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INHERITANCE AND LEGACY IN EARLY MODERN REVENGE TRAGEDY 1550 - 1610

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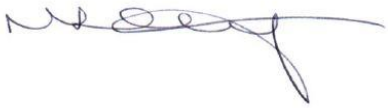
Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.



Natalie Lankester-Carthy

Abstract

My thesis examines how changing perceptions of the past, and escalating anxieties about the future, brought about by a disputed succession and the religious upheavals of the sixteenth century, impacted on the development of revenge tragedy. Through a close analysis of the motifs of inheritance and legacy, I shall consider the ways in which revenge plays reshape Senecan ideas on hereditary violence, redress, and retribution for contemporary audiences. This thesis shows how the revenge tradition pulls some enduring sixteenth and seventeenth-century political preoccupations with disordered patrimonies into excessively violent narratives and reflects on the significance of these tropes for the authors and audiences of this popular mode.

My project analyses how these key themes develop chronologically from the accession of Elizabeth I, to the early Jacobean period. The thesis does not aim to provide a comprehensive survey of the genre but examines the evolution of these themes in some defining instances of the mode to broach a new reading. While most scholarship of revenge tragedy begins with the drama of the 1590s, my study explores new insights into the tradition by starting with the classical translations of the mid sixteenth-century. It then follows the trajectory of the genre towards its sustained incorporation of parody and tragicomedy in the early seventeenth century.

I begin my inquiry with some close analysis of the lexical choices in the Senecan translations, looking at Heywood's *Thyestes* in particular and its accentuation of maternity and succession. I build upon these initial observations in my analysis of some of the more frequently-discussed revenge plays in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus*, looking specifically at how these works explore language, autonomy, and memory. My focus on inheritance and legacy leads me to investigate how the history of *Richard III* deals with revenge tropes surrounding legacy, violence, and redress. The final chapter looks at how *The Revenger's Tragedy* self-consciously interrogates its position as a successor to the traditions explored in this thesis, and ultimately how the text reappraises understandings of memory, storytelling, and narrative conclusions.

Critics have noted how the speed of political and religious change in the period contributed to an increasing sense of disjuncture with the past and exacerbated

apprehensions about impending instability. My analysis aims to shed new light on how such responses affected the genre's preoccupation with balancing the debts of the past and ensuring the stability of the future. Although conventions of the revenge genre are predominantly concerned with anxieties around the loss of heirs and of lines unnaturally stopped, this project considers how the sixteenth-century revenge tradition also introduces notions of legacy and continuity. I shall demonstrate how narrative and language are explored as potential sources of reparation and renewal, in their ability to forge a sense of meaning in an ever-changing world.

Lay Summary

My thesis examines how changing perceptions of the past, and escalating anxieties about the future, brought about by a disputed succession and the religious upheavals of the sixteenth century, impacted on the development of revenge tragedy.

Revenge tragedy, also called the “tragedy of blood”, is a subgenre of tragedy, popular in the commercial theatre of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Revenge narratives conventionally portray a discontented protagonist engaged in the pursuit of personal justice and feature highly stylised, allusion-laden rhetoric and the striking use of violence as spectacle. The genre is considered to have been heavily influenced by classical authors, and particularly the tragedies of the Roman dramatist, Lucius Annaeus Seneca, whose work was widely read in the sixteenth century. Through a close analysis of the motifs of inheritance and legacy, I shall consider the ways in which revenge plays reshape Senecan ideas on hereditary violence, redress, and retribution for contemporary audiences. This thesis shows how the revenge tradition pulls some enduring sixteenth and seventeenth-century political preoccupations with disordered patrimonies into excessively violent narratives and reflects on the significance of these tropes for the authors and audiences of this popular mode.

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specifically at how these works explore language, autonomy, and memory. My focus on inheritance and legacy leads me to investigate how Shakespeare's history of Richard III (c.1592) deals with revenge tropes surrounding legacy, violence, and redress. The final chapter looks at how Thomas Middleton's The Revenger's Tragedy (1606) self-consciously interrogates its position as a successor to the traditions explored in this thesis, and ultimately how the text reappraises understandings of memory, storytelling, and narrative conclusions.

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Contents

Introduction: avenging and appeasing the past

This thesis examines how changing understandings of the past, and escalating anxieties about the future, influenced by a disputed succession and the religious upheavals of the sixteenth century, impacted on the development of revenge tragedy. Looking specifically at how classical influences and contemporary political anxieties coalesce and converge in the genre's preoccupation with inheritance and legacy, I shall demonstrate how the tropes of revenge drama betray a particular interest in how problematic, and often traumatic, histories might be incorporated into a broader narrative. Obligation and debt, succession and linage, and memory and storytelling are all recurrent concerns of revenge plots and the following analysis explores how these authors embedded contemporary concerns into classical frameworks, and the ways in which these extraordinarily violent, and frequently chaotic, narratives seek to forge continuity in disordered worlds.

In "History, Memory, and the English Reformation", Alexandra Walsham points out how understandings of the present as distinct from a "remote and idealized past" became explicit in the sixteenth century:

> [I]t was in the late sixteenth century that modernity as a concept and a category entered the vernacular language and into widespread use. The emergence of the word 'modern' to describe current times and to demarcate them from the golden age of ancient Greece and Rome […] reflected a retrospective outlook that entailed an attempt to transform the present through dialogue with this classical heritage, and to move forwards into the future by imitating a remote and idealized past. It involved not sharp dissociation from this past but rather dialectical engagement with it, an attempt to return *ad fontes* to the original source and fountain of its glory and greatness (Walsham "History, Memory, and the English Reformation" 901).

The following chapters consider how these emergent temporal understandings of the past are explored in early modern revenge narratives and examine how the prominent tropes of inheritance and legacy reflect both an overwhelming sense of indebtedness to the past and a problematic and ambivalent relationship with it. While the texts of this study emphasise the importance of understanding and remembering the past, they also foreground the problems surrounding a traumatic inheritance and its effective integration. Heritage, primogeniture, and the securing of legitimate heirs were politically contentious

topics in sixteenth-century society, where the monarch "claimed to hold authority primarily by virtue of inheritance" (Hattaway 108). England's coronation of five monarchs in the space of eleven years, and the consequent conflicts in religious orthodoxy, exacerbated anxieties of political instability and heightened the public demand for a natural heir of Elizabeth's body to settle the succession. This thesis argues that these revenge tragedies, written in a period of intense political uncertainty, express particular anxieties surrounding fractured and ambivalent relationships with the past, and how they might be structured and aligned into a stable, coherent narrative.

The past is not only a recurrent thematic concern of revenge plots but has a tangible and material presence on the stage; in the form of quotations, references, and framing devices. Hieronimo is widely-considered to be carrying a copy of Seneca in one of the most famous revenge soliloquies (*vindicta mihi*, perhaps second only to Hamlet's "To be or not to be […]"), and Lavinia identifies her killers in a copy of Ovid (*TST*. III. xiii. 1; *H*. III. i. 56). Renewed interest in "long-dead genres" in sixteenth-century theatre primarily centred around the classics and included the works of Aristotle, Cicero, Ovid, and many others, but the works of Seneca have been considered particularly influential for revenge tragedy (Pollard "Tragedy and Revenge" 63). My analysis looks closely at the Senecan translations of the 1560s and uses these as a starting point for a broader consideration of the revenge genre and its understanding of inheritance and legacy. Critics of early modern tragedy have more recently begun to extend their analyses to include late-medieval drama and have sought to "re-establish […] a lost connection" between canonical texts and their precedents (Pincombe "Theories and Antecedents" 14). My project attempts something similar with revenge tragedy, extending the boundaries to include the classical translation that influenced the sixteenth-century Neo-Latin style of revenge, and the historical and political drama that adopted these conventions. Studies on the influence of Seneca on revenge tragedy usually focus on its hyper-violence and a fondness for highly-stylised rhetoric; and while I touch on these elements, my focus shall be on how the genre adapts Senecan understandings of the tyranny of the past, of destructive repetition, and balance and retribution for early modern audiences.

The following pages explore some of the critical fields and historical contexts that inform this thesis, beginning with an overview of revenge tragedy as a genre and its

relationship to classical precedents, before moving on to summarise some of the sixteenth-century legal, political, and religious concerns that shaped the conventions of inheritance and legacy in the genre. In conclusion, I will explain the methods and objectives of this thesis and provide a short summary of the chapters that follow.

Revenge Tragedy

The tragic subgenre of Revenge Tragedy refers to a set of tragedies produced in the Elizabethan period from the mid-sixteenth to the early seventeenth-century. The terminology is relatively modern, coined by Ashley H. Thorndike in his 1902 essay "The Relations of Hamlet to Contemporary Revenge Plays" and expanded upon in Fredson Bowers' 1966 study *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, 1587-1642*. It is often noted that "Elizabethans themselves recognized no distinct dramatic type called the revenge play" and consequently, critics have been wary of attributing too much weight to the modern categorisation (Broude 38). While this point is incontrovertible, it is also probable that dramatists considered themselves to be writing in collaboration with a European taste for hyper-violent Senecan revivals, sometimes referred to as "tragedies of blood". As Clayton M. Hamilton observes, the "pseudo-Senecan" Italian tradition "created monstrosities of tragic horror which exerted no little influence on the English dramatists" (Hamilton 412). Thorndike considered revenge tragedy to be "distinct species of the tragedy of blood" (Thorndike 125). This thesis explores the concept of the "tragedy of blood" in terms of bloodlines and familial ties and questions how such elements interact with the narrative of violence and revenge; ultimately proposing that the plays' handling of such "blood debt" is part of a larger interrogation of the period's relationship with the past, how to repay, remember, and assimilate antecedents in a manner that honours the "ghosts" of the past and incorporates them into a more balanced and stable future.

Tanya Pollard comments on the sudden explosion of revenge tragedy on the English stage, confirming that "its emergence at the time was entirely unprecedented" (Pollard "Tragedy and Revenge" 59). Although there is evidence to suggest revenge plays were still being written up to the curtailing of public drama in the 1640s, Pollard suggests that by this time they had "lost their cutting-edge status" and faded from the prominent position they once held in the public imagination (Spolsky 175; Pollard "Tragedy and Revenge" 70). Yet, despite some debate surrounding the longevity of

revenge tragedy as a genre, its currency in the latter half of the sixteenth and into the early seventeenth-century is indisputable, with the "sheer number" of revenge plots published in this period attesting to their popularity (Woodbridge *English Revenge Drama* 4). Many critics have observed the debts to Seneca in the conventions of revenge tragedy, including the five-act structure, the revenge ghost, and lengthy, rhetorical monologues. Several of the earlier plays also feature direct quotations from Seneca in Latin, denoting a widespread familiarity with his work in the period. Gordon Braden confirms that the "displacement of medieval by classical influences" in the mid sixteenth-century, and the "slight circulation of Greek drama in the Renaissance" prescribes a crucial role for Seneca in any analysis of sixteenth-century tragedy (Braden *Anger's Privilege* 63). There has been a suggestion that Seneca's influence on Renaissance writers has been overstated in twentieth-century criticism, particularly regarding its prominence over other native influences in medieval drama. However, as Robert Miola suggests:

> The reaction against earlier acceptance of Senecan influence corrected excesses and rightly insisted on the importance of non-classical traditions; it was itself excessive, however, often exhibiting an either/or mentality that over-simplified the complexities of literary history (Miola 4).

More recently, critics have avoided the "fallacy of the unique source" and concentrated on how the many and varied influences combine in Renaissance drama, and what may be considered early modern adaptations of classical sources (Miola 10). I take the translations of Seneca, and classical ideas surrounding blood debt, as the starting point of my analysis of inheritance and legacy but shall also consider the hybridity of the genre and the numerous native influences that converge and overlap with the classical.

The birth of revenge tragedy is often considered to have coincided with the emergence of the commercial theatre. As English theatre progressed from the academic institutions of the Inns of Court, to the purpose-built theatres emerging in the 1570s, the style of the drama was adapted accordingly. Darryll Grantley clarifies how this new context impacted the public perception of drama:

> [C]ollaborations were frequent and fluid, often involving three or more writers. This arose from the fact that the theatre was a commercial institution with a voracious appetite for new material, and plays tended

> to be regarded in the light of artisanal products rather than great works of art (Grantley 11).

This attitude has been reflected in the critical reception of these early commercial plays, and as Woodbridge suggests, revenge plays, with their unquenching thirst for blood, have too often been dismissed as the "primordial slime from which Shakespearean tragedy emerged" (Woodbridge *English Revenge Drama* 3). However, more recently, revenge tragedy has been given deeper consideration, with critics considering the plays' value as part of a collaborative, "mongrel genre […]", made up of many, varied influences (Cartwright 100). There has been some debate about how best to evaluate the literary value of revenge drama amongst critics (Cartwright 100). As a result of the critical distaste for the genre in earlier decades of the twentieth century, commentary has traditionally focused on the genre's role in literary history and their legacy on the Renaissance stage. Hallett and Hallett discuss how examination of the narrative of revenge can get lost in discussions of how authors inherit the genre from their predecessors:

> [Many] studies examine the conventional motifs more for the evidence they give that one playwright's work derives from another's than what they tell us about the revenge experience […] The entire thrust of this type of scholarship precludes our ever discovering whether revenge tragedy has significance as a literary form (Hallett and Hallett 4-5).

While this thesis charts the chronology of the revenge style, it also focuses attention on the literary qualities and thematic concerns of the genre. Christopher Crosbie argues that there has been too much focus on "revenge" as the unifying trope of the mode: "The twentieth-century creation of revenge tragedy as a genre drew critical attention, fortuitously, to a remarkable set of plays yet, unfortunately, away from some of their most intriguing aspects through its privileging of revenge as principal object of inquiry" (Crosbie "Philosophies of Retribution" 15). This thesis examines tropes of inheritance and legacy as key literary components of the "revenge experience", and charts how this is explored through the relatively short period of the genre's popularity. In this sense, I hope to address both objectives, by exploring the various meanings and implications of inheritance as a literary tool in revenge tragedy and consider how this was reflected in the historical development of the genre.

Along with "having a good claim to being the dominant theme of English Renaissance tragedy", man's propensity to revenge, and his consequent disengagement

with moral and common law, was a prominent socio-political concern in the period, for as the centralised state grew larger, there was an increasing need to ensure that the law was recognised throughout all of England's former provinces (Pollard "Tragedy and Revenge" 58). But there was a recognition of the lure of revenge as a form of justice in the period, and as Hallett and Hallett point out "dramatists definitely understood revenge to be an emotion that could easily present itself as having a claim on the reasonable as well as the irrational, and on the moral as well as the evil" (Hallett and Hallett 7). Modern studies on the effect of revenge on the psyche have changed little from these early assessments, with recent scientific studies commenting on the "paradoxical outcomes" of revenge, and indicating that avengers "demonstrate a provocative lapse in insight, such that the actual impact of revenge is precisely opposite to how people think it affects them" and that while revengers may "punish others, in part, to repair their negative mood and to provide psychological closure to the precipitating event […] the act of punishment yields precisely the opposite outcome" (Eadeh, Peak and Lambert 28; Carlsmith, Wilson and Gilbert 1316). This allure to "set things right" and balance out the crimes of the past rarely ends well for revengers, who invariably add to an ever-expanding list of wrongs and seal their own fate in the process. I examine how this convention pertains to contemporary anxieties surrounding the availability of justice in the context of political, legal and religious change in the sixteenth-century.

Old and new justice

Thematic and stylistic litigiousness in sixteenth century drama is an ongoing and prolific area of critical research as "few periods or kinds of literature show such a deep and comprehensive engagement with [the law]" (Mukherji 2). Changes in the function of the law, in legal discourse, and a greater understanding of legal matters in the public imagination all had a part to play in the "law-mindedness" of Renaissance drama, and particularly evident in revenge tragedy (Hutson 4). Francis Bacon famously describes revenge in his *Essays* as "a kind of wild justice which the more Man's nature runs to, the more ought law to weed it out: for as for the first wrong, it does but offend the law; but the revenge of that wrong putteth the law out of office" (Bacon 347). Justice and retribution are probably the most prominent and consistent features of the "revenge experience" and some of the most frequently considered (Hallett and Hallett 4-5). I hope to shed some

new light on this discussion, by examining the ways in which these elements interact with inheritance, looking in particular in the genre's concern with a historical imbalance that, once bequeathed, must be requited.

The plots of revenge tragedy are repeatedly entangled in conflicting ideas of justice, and the remnants of feudalism still present in the early modern legal system have been one area critics have explored in relation to revenge and its cultural significance in sixteenth-century society. As court systems became more centralised and formalised, the estrangement of ordinary people, and the lack of avenues available to achieve recompense, became prominent concerns, and anxieties began to surface about a citizen's direct access to justice (Chengdan 6683; Day 84). Ellen Spolsky goes on to confirm that while the new court system set up by the Tudor monarchs was indisputably a response to "the need for justice in new and expanded areas of commercial life", there is no doubt that the "enlargement of an individual citizen's world" alongside the distancing effect of a centralised justice system, "would itself have produced a widespread anxiety about justice and fairness by blurring the transparency of social systems and etiolating the bonds of trust that had implicitly governed exchanges between kith and kin" (Spolsky 159).

This sense of conflicted loyalties is evident in revenge tragedy, where laborious legal systems must be surmounted in the pursuit of familial recompense. Hieronimo, as Knight Marshall, is a representative of this new type of justice system, but finds his pleas go unheard in relation to the death of his son. In Act III. sc. xii, this distancing effect is literalised when Hieronimo, desperate to achieve "justice by entreats", is physically prevented from accessing the King (III. viii. 72). Spolsky suggests that revenge plays were so popular because the plight of the revenge protagonist represented similar perceptions of injustice in this new legal framework:

> The paths of the litigant in the London courts and of the protagonist in a revenge play are similar. As the litigant begins from an injury or imbalance that awakens the desire for rectification, so the revenge play begins from an abusive action that awakens the desire for revenge. The plays introduce an unbalancing effect by a grotesque and emotionally evocative spectacle of horror (Spolsky 178).

And yet the bloody spectacle of revenge was not only "emotionally evocative" but uncannily reminiscent of an older style of justice, and a major catalyst of the action, the

blood feud, and the rectification of infractions against the "social unit […] established by kinship", blood, and birth right (Broude 44). Spolsky comments on how the "the body of the protagonist is forced to enact the pain of a moral imbalance" in the acute violence of the play, and this is particularly pertinent when considering the self-inflicted violence of Hieronimo or Titus, but I would argue that the body and blood in these plays is also representative of a sense of allegiance and heritage that was felt to be in decline (Spolsky 175). However, its message is not simply one of nostalgia for a bygone system, for the world of the blood-feud in which the protagonist is entangled never ends well and the sense of balance and equity that is so desired is always deferred.

In *The Revenger's Madness: a study of revenge tragedy motifs,* Hallett and Hallett point out the paradox of this narrative: "The act of revenge does not correct an imbalance and restore order, purely and simply, with the even exchange of eye for eye, tooth for tooth. Revenge is itself an act of excess" (Hallett and Hallett 11). And this is generally where the remnants of the old, medieval-style justice overlap with that of classical antiquity in revenge plays, for although the protagonist longs for balance and equilibrium, he almost always seeks to achieve this through the Senecan model of *maius nefas*, or "greater horror". We return to this sense of paradox, for while the motivation and longing may be for a sense of equity in a revenge narrative, the impulse is invariably for escalation and exorbitance, and the audience are carried along with this unruly, "wild", pursuit of justice with no real concept of how it will reach its conclusion, aside from the fact that the revenger will be forced to sacrifice his life. Woodbridge writes extensively about the genre's concern with equity and its relationship with contemporary unease concerning the authority and impartiality of the law:

> [F]airness fixation and relish of vigilantism reveal widespread resentment of systemic unfairness – economic, political, and social – as the Renaissance witnessed severe disproportion between crime and punishment, between labor and its rewards (Woodbridge *English Revenge Drama* 6-7).

The plays of this period acknowledge this disparity and make manifest its terrible consequences, but any suggestion of resolution is often fraught with ambivalence. As in another legally-minded, literary text of the mid sixteenth century, *The Mirror for Magistrates*, revenge plays frequently demonstrate the perils of a ruling class that is out of touch with the people, stressing the importance of equity, by "making tragedy rehearse

the disastrous ends of political error" (Campbell "Introduction" 38). Yet, it has also been suggested that the revenge narrative was perhaps not so revolutionary; for it enabled playgoers to satisfy a more general appetite for tangible and recognisable justice, while also serving the social function of warning against the pursuit of private justice, which is shown to perpetually consume the individual.

As Mukherji suggests, the genre's engagement with the law is not only symbolic, but "deep and comprehensive" (Mukherji 2). Unlike their classical precedents, sixteenth-century revenge plots commonly feature the intricate detail of due process, foregrounding elaborate investigations, the devising of appropriate punishments, and the performance of vengeance. Lorna Hutson describes how a greater understanding of legal process led to this a particular preoccupation with "evidential concepts" in revenge drama (Hutson 5). Hutson goes on to confirm how this influenced the narrative style of sixteenth-century drama, which tended to lay out the sequential facts of a case for the judgement of the audience (Hutson 7). However, it is clear that this style of *narratio* or "narrative of the facts" was not intended to slowly reveal the responsible party (for this information is usually made available early on in the plot) but symptomatic of increasing public interest in the narrative and performative elements of legal process (Hutson 7). Legal drama's emphasis on temporality and "natural order"; of due process, balance and of the appropriate level and style of vengeance is also significant for our study. The sequence, and fitting nature of the revenge is crucial in its ability to neutralise the crimes of the past. Counterbalance and redress are fundamental elements of revenge tragedy, frequently depicted in conflict with the Senecan drive towards *maius nefas.* The destruction of heritage and legacy are the principal crimes for which revenge protagonists seek redress, and the undertaking is bound up with ideas of balancing out the injustices of the past to secure the legacy of the future.

Bradin Cormack observes an inherent temporality in sixteenth-century inheritance law that is particularly relevant for my analysis of legacy when he confirms the semantic differentiation between the legal terminology of "heir" and "heir apparent" (Cormack 61). Cormack confirms that the "heir" did not legally exist until after the death of the ancestor: "the heir was less a material than a legal and formal person and, conversely, that the heir apparent who did have material existence, precisely lacked status as a legal person"

(Cormack 61). The term “heir apparent” or “issue” were legally attached to an individual, but “heir” was only bestowed on the descendant after the death of the predecessor:

> [Y]ou are always in this sense your own heir, you are not however, your own issue, since one’s issue existed materially in natural time, and not only in the legal time that conveniently disposed the form of the heir into the future, until such a time as that indefinite form should be charged by definite matter (Cormack 63).

While precise legal terminology will not be the focus of this thesis, this complex legal distinction is important for this analysis, as so many of the protagonists of revenge tragedy wrestle with a similar confusion regarding their temporal relationship with heirs. So many fathers in this study consider their heir (or more accurately their issue/heir apparent) to represent the stability of the future, but struggle in the face of their own eradication and displacement. The heirs of revenge tragedy hover between these two definitions, as the term likely did in the public imagination, they are at once symbolic of immortality and omens of death.

Stevie Simkin suggests that revenge tragedy repeatedly invites us to “reassess the links between justice and revenge, violence and the social order [and in so doing, continues] to challenge audiences and readers to engage directly with the politics of the past and the present, and the ways in which they interrelate” (Simkin 19). Changes to secular law and understandings of justice were compounded by revisions to religious doctrine in the period. After the Reformation, the role of the individual in matters of retribution was greatly reduced, which impacted on public sympathies with personal vengeance. While the “eye for an eye” principle was a familiar one in sixteenth-century society, Lily B. Campbell notes that early modern attitudes towards revenge were largely influenced by the Epistle to the Romans “Recompense to no man evil for evil …Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19; Campbell “Theories of Revenge” 281-2) . The understanding of vengeance as restoring the balance of justice was supported by Protestant theology, but the right to such vengeance sat firmly with God. Ronald Broude draws a comparison between this understanding and the legal description of crimes against the state:

> Neither Tudor political theory nor Tudor religion rejected the blood-for-blood ethic which was the basis of private, public, and divine vengeance

> alike. It was simply asserted that in matters of felony, God and the king were the parties most offended, and that to them was reserved the right to exact retribution. In general, Tudor attitudes toward crime and punishment manifested little concern with either 'Christian' mercy or the social rehabilitation of the criminal. The sterner aspects of Tudor justice were reinforced by the Reformation, with its shift in emphasis from God's saving mercy to His avenging wrath (Broude 50).

Broude suggests that public sympathy and justification for revenge intensified in this period as the "Reformation was seen by Protestant thinkers as the providentially ordered visitation of God's vengeance upon the Satanic forces which had corrupted the Church" (Broude 53). Lily B. Campbell suggests that God's vengeance is the major theme that dominates revenge tragedy, and while I agree that a revenger's dilemma is frequently concerned with the conflict between personal and religious obligations, my analysis suggests that the central preoccupation of revenge drama is the *absence* of justice, whether divine, legal, or psychological, that creates a dearth of meaning (Campbell "Theories of Revenge" 294). The protagonist waits patiently for the perpetrator to be called to account by God, the state, or his own conscience, but this very rarely comes, and it is this absence that causes a fraction in the protagonist's understanding of continuity and cohesion. Within this lack of recompense, the dead have been forgotten and any faith in the integrity of their surroundings has been lost. For while the vengeance may be personal in these plays, the instability they expose is almost always communal; the concern is for the downfall of the entire system. As Broude points out, the legal system portrayed in these plays is a reflection of God's law: "Tudor theorists explained crime as an offense against God, a source of communal pollution which, should the criminal long remain unpunished, threatened to bring divine wrath down upon the entire commonweal (Broude 47-8). This sense of "pollution" is particularly acute in Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy,*[1] where the personal grievances of the avenger, Vindice, are almost forgotten in the pursuit of a cleansed state, and communal equity.

Again, we return to the motif of balance. In *The End of Satisfaction: drama and repentance in the age of Shakespeare,* Heather Hirschfield observes this "special reciprocity, even entanglement, between revenge and repentance" and emphasises the

[1] There is some debate about the authorship of *The Revenger's Tragedy,* with some attributing the work to Cyril Tourneur. My analysis accepts recent sources that suggest the play was written by Thomas Middleton, but I will say more on this in chapter four.

"role of *satisfaction"* as key, representing "the shared aim of both the revenger and the penitent" (Hirschfeld *The End of Satisfaction* 65). Hirschfeld uses the closet scene in *Hamlet* as an illustration of how the revenger ultimately desires penitence, knowledge, and understanding of the crime committed. Francis Bacon highlights this same element of revenge in his essays: "Some, when they take revenge, are desirous the party should know whence it cometh: this is the more generous; for the delight seemeth to be not so much in doing the hurt, as in making the party repent: but the base and crafty cowards are like the arrow that flieth in the dark" (Bacon 348). From a Christian perspective, this type of vengeance is less troublesome, for while there is still a concern that the avenger is taking the part of God in desiring the repentance of the wrongdoer, the action is less attributable to self-interested impulse, and consequently, less dangerous. However, while the avengers of these plays frequently require the criminal to understand their punishment (usually outlined in the "reveal" scene in the final act), this is typically connected with their desire to enact the "appropriate" style of vengeance, usually "punishment in kind". When Hamlet decides against killing Claudius in prayer, it is because the punishment would not be fitting, his soul would be clean, "fit and season'd for his passage", unlike Old Hamlet who was taken "full of bread, / With all his crimes broad blown" (III. iii. 80-1). Hamlet emphasises the difference between violence and revenge, true revenge must be a mirror to the original crime:

> Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;
> And now I'll do't. And so he goes to heaven;
> And so am I revenged. That would be scann'd:
> A villain kills my father; and for that,
> I, his sole son, do this same villain send
> To heaven.
> O, this is hire and salary, not revenge (III. iii. 73-9).

This delay reflects the element of "inheritance" in a revenger's mission, and perhaps goes some way in explaining the proclivity for the crime to be revealed by theatrical means; it is not enough that the perpetrator is punished, satisfaction and restoration can only come from the punishment reflecting the original crime and the resulting mirror image triggering understanding and acceptance. This sense of delay is present in all revenge tragedy, as the main plot is situated between the original transgression, occurring either at the start of the play or before the play opens, and the act of vengeance and satisfaction which unfolds in the final act. The bulk of the action is taken up by the isolation of the avenger

and the plotting of the "correct" revenge; there is a sense of striking a delicate balance with what has gone before to both repay the crime and retain some mainstay of the future.

This desire for the "right" kind of revenge interrelates with the ways in which revenge narratives explore the fatalism inherited from their classical sources. In "Time and Causality in Renaissance Revenge Tragedy", R. L. Kesler argues that "Tragic heroes do not understand that causality has led to their position, they believe it to be fate" (Kesler 493). There is a considerable amount of ambivalence around conceptions of fate in revenge tragedy, for while the notion of determinism is much more muted than in classical tragedy, there is a perpetual sense of inherited duty, of an avenger being "born to set it right" (*H*. I. v. 197). Gary Day suggests that the prominence given to revenge in Senecan drama "chimed more easily with Renaissance ideas of self-determination than the idea of fate or the notion that the gods controlled human destiny" (Day 84). And while I agree that this is likely, I would suggest that remnants of the classical preoccupation with determinism, curses, and fate are still present in revenge tragedy's preoccupation with primogeniture and the family line. When Hamlet exclaims "The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right!", after meeting the ghost of Old Hamlet, he acknowledges how the crime has polluted his family, his identity and his environment, and his future becomes, in that very moment, sealed in his sense of duty to his father (I. v. 196-7). In this sense, it is simultaneously a fate that he consciously participates in, and one that is equally inescapable. Hallett and Hallett suggest that Hamlet, and others of his ilk, are just one type of avenger, "the hero-revenger […] who is led (one might almost say dragged) to revenge by forces outside of himself" in a type of quasi-fated destiny, but that there is another type of avenger "the villain-revenger [who is] prompted to his actions by nothing more than his own cravings" (Hallett and Hallett 6). The task of the audience is to decide which of these they are watching – a protagonist bound by inherited duty or one using this façade of integrity to mask his true intentions? Hieronimo might be a good example of the former, and certainly Richard III matches the latter, Vindice probably falls somewhere in between. I argue that while the protagonists of this study largely consider their actions to be their own (with the possible exception of Thyestes), they also come to demonstrate an acute understanding of their role within a wider narrative, and this is something I will return to later in the thesis.

The hereditary curse: succession and sterility

As we have discussed, the legal motifs of balance and redress are frequently articulated terms of debt in revenge tragedy: debts of retribution and debts of obligation. The need to balance the actions of the past to move into an authentic future is a recurrent theme of the genre, and one which is frequently bound up with patrilineal succession. Legitimate heirs are consistently made emblematic of stable futures, but the texts in this study also grapple with ideas of displacement and usurpation. One of the central tropes of debt in Greek, but also Roman drama, is that of the inherited curse. The inherited curse of classical tragedy, generated by ancestral history, was traced through the fates of descendant family members, each subsequent play followed the action, saga-like, down the familial line. This thesis considers how this classical concept was adapted on the early modern stage and ultimately becomes a metaphor for problematic relationships with the past. In *Guilt by Descent,* N. J. Sewell-Rutter describes how the inherited curse was used as a trope in classical tragedy: “The tragedians do not examine inherited guilt aridly or in a vacuum: they weave it into the structure of their plays, introducing it at crucial moments and making it a central part of the emotional dynamics of the texts” (Sewell-Rutter 28). The lore of inherited guilt is used as a metaphor in classical tragedy, Greek and Roman, to demonstrate the interconnectedness of crime and retribution and of familial lines, past and present. Eric R. Dodds describes how classical philosophy encapsulated this sense of continuity: “Unfair as it might be, but to them it appeared a law of nature, which must be accepted: for the family was a moral unit, the son’s life was a prolongation of the father’s, and he inherited his father’s moral debts exactly as he inherited his commercial ones” (Dodds 34).

Such ideas from classical antiquity clearly resonated with Renaissance writers, working within a period where connections with the past and the security of the future were becoming increasingly fraught. Peter Lake confirms that “[t]he reigns of Roman emperors both early and late” were frequently cited in Renaissance drama “to show the wisdom and necessity of settling the succession, and the dreadful consequences of failing to do so” (Lake 8). Interestingly, Gordon Braden observes that one striking difference between Greek and Latin drama is that the emphasis in the former is on the killing of parents, whereas the latter gives prominence to the horror of infanticide (Braden "Senecan Tragedy and the Renaissance" 290). The texts selected for this study follow a

similar pattern, and this is important for my analysis, as it encapsulates the symbolic preoccupation with the past and annihilation of the future that I argue is entrenched in the revenge narrative. However, this thesis will also explore how sixteenth-century adaptations navigate the "bleak […] terrain" of their Senecan predecessors to reflect on how memory and legacy might offer a potential reprieve of the future (Braden "Senecan Tragedy and the Renaissance" 292).

The death of the father is a major theme in both Renaissance and classical tragedy, and one which has been much discussed. However, I would suggest that the associated themes of pregnancy and gestation, the loss of children, disordered successions, and the significance of legacy have been relatively neglected. I examine how these prominent motifs of revenge tragedy echoed contemporary anxieties surrounding inheritance and legacy in the early Elizabethan reign and developed alongside them. The instability of the short and fragmented reigns of Edward, Mary I, and Lady Jane Grey, and the religious upheaval that went with them, made preventing the "cataclysm of a contested succession" the most pressing issue of Elizabeth's parliament (Lake 70). So much so, that Elizabeth prohibited discussion of the succession in an Act of Parliament in 1571 (Doran and Kewes 10). However, as Elizabeth's reign progressed without the security of an heir and the English throne faced various dynastic claims from Mary Queen of Scots to the King of Spain, questions on the succession "raged more fiercely than ever" (Lake 69; Hopkins 1). As Lisa Hopkins confirms in *Drama and the Succession to the Crown, 1561-1633,* precisely because "questions pertaining to the succession were so politically sensitive", drama of the period became a valuable (but cautious) "forum for discussion" (Hopkins 9). While there have been several insightful studies into how the succession crisis affected Elizabethan Drama,[2] to date there hasn't been a sustained analysis of how issues of succession influenced the particular conventions of revenge tragedy. I demonstrate how the revenge genre's temporal preoccupations, with debts to the past and securities of the future, are influenced by

[2] See Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (1977), Lisa Hopkins *Drama and the Succession to the Crown, 1561- 1633* (2011), Peter Lake, *How Shakespeare Put Politics on the Stage Power and Succession in the History Plays* (2016), Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes, *Doubtful and Dangerous: The Question of Succession in Late Elizabethan England* (2016).

political and social change; particularly the succession crisis and changing understandings of the past brought about by the Reformation.

Primogeniture is frequently celebrated as a mode of political stability in these narratives (with the loss of heirs presented as the instigator of chaos), but this is complicated by its propensity to create familial instability. Tragic narratives are filled with warring and usurping siblings, desperate to overturn the natural line of succession. Chris McMahon argues that primogeniture is frequently aligned with the providential in revenge drama, for the alternative was an election which "generat[ed] competition [and] corruption", or civil war (McMahon 89). Alternately, primogeniture places trust in God, who, in deciding who will be born, "constructs genealogies regardless of the preferences of human beings" (McMahon 89). Paradoxically, the revenge narratives of this thesis articulate the supremacy and inherent value of primogeniture, while demonstrating the practical flaws of such a system. There is an underlying sense that for a society to reap the rewards of natural succession, citizens must strive beyond their base, human proclivities to be worthy of it. This desire for a righteous, natural succession united otherwise disparate factions of Elizabethan society, with "Catholics and Protestants alike" remaining "obsessed" with what was to happen after the queen's death long after her prohibition of the topic (Lake 17). I explore how drama of the early Elizabethan reign is preoccupied with pregnancy and the generation of legitimate heirs as a process of stability, or more specifically, the opposite understanding of how sterility and a disordered line leads to political and familial chaos. Elizabeth's motto *semper eadem,* or "always the same" encapsulates the paradox of a national desire for continuity, and her pointed refusal to marry or secure the succession (Hopkins 15; Lake 17). The queen's controversial decision to speak of continuity only in the context of her own interminable reign, while no doubt intended to protect her throne from alternate claims, "seemed to many of her subjects and counsellors, desperately dangerous" (Lake 17).

However, as has been historically documented, Elizabeth's resolve was steadfast on the succession issue. In *Doubtful and Dangerous*: *the question of succession in late Elizabethan England*, Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes argue that while the succession crisis "mutated and evolved" from 1558 to 1603, the issue persisted throughout Elizabeth's queenship (Doran and Kewes 7). As the queen aged and the likelihood of her producing an heir became more remote, the national desire for continuity began to adjust,

and so too, did contemporary drama. Patrick Collinson confirms that while the legacy of The Virgin Queen "is the Elizabethan persona most familiar to us, and perhaps always most congenial to her" it was a relatively late conception, "one which was fully developed only towards 1580 and back-projected into the earlier years of the reign" (Collinson "The Elizabethan Exclusion Crisis and the Elizabethan Polity" 63). This conception and construction of the queen's legacy can be detected in later Elizabethan drama, which shifts beyond the continuity of heirs and towards the constructed linearity of memory and storytelling. We see elements of this in the later, childless plays of this thesis, in Shakespeare's *Richard III* (which was likely written in 1592 before Elizabeth's death in 1603, but performed after in 1633), and Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, dated 1606. This conceptual understanding of legacy was important to James' legitimacy as King, for his claim to Elizabeth's throne was stronger on political and theological grounds than on biological ones. During Elizabeth's lifetime and even after her death, James went to great lengths to establish himself as the "natural" successor to Elizabeth's throne and to write himself into the story of her legacy (Doran and Kewes 5). Griffiths Jones explains the many ways in which James sought to "construct an elaborate public bond" between himself and the dead Queen; seeking to perpetuate an image of continuity, he made efforts to "identify himself with Elizabeth's popular image, and to appropriate her glory" (Jones 327; 329).

Although, as Hopkins observes, the succession question was not altogether resolved after the accession of James, my study shows how problematic relationships with the past and anxieties surrounding a lack of heirs were particularly sensitive during the Elizabethan period (Hopkins 7). It is not the intention of this thesis to argue that the texts show a clean break from the anxieties of sterility in favour of conceptual legacies at the turn of the seventeenth century, but to explore the ways in which these two interrelated topics blend and overlap throughout the period of Elizabeth's accession, her lengthy reign, and in the aftermath of her death.

Memory and linearity

However, it was not only the Tudor succession crisis that made legacy a particularly sensitive and contentious topic in the period. The Reformation's "rage against the dead" in its prohibition of Catholic commemorative and funerary rituals made

remembrance and memory points of cultural and political tension (Marshall *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* 93). Thomas Rist explains how the "ritual and 'social performance' [of] traditional, Christian remembrance of the dead entailed repeated performances of prayerful memory", rituals which were "considered effective aids to the dead in purgatory" (Rist *Drama of Commemoration* 4). As the Reformed church considered such practice sinful and idolatry (as it was rooted in a belief that human intervention could influence the judgement of God) practices of commemoration were subjected to enforced restraint in the period. The impact of these changes will undoubtedly have been felt in many areas of sixteenth-century life, but contemporary drama has been a particularly fertile area of research in gauging popular opinion. Critics have observed the myriad ways in which the subject matter of tragedy enabled sixteenth-century playwrights to explore "the difficulty that arises when a culture eliminates the exchange that was thought to exist between the living and the dead" (Anderson 11). We return to this idea of disrupted exchange and the difficulties this poses for continuity. R. L. Kesler describes revenge protagonists as "residual members of a world or representational system in which identity was constructed by older methods, wak[ing] within a world in which the rules of the game have changed" (Kesler 492). And while this description applies more broadly, to its classical-leanings, its understandings of justice, or of inherited obligation, it is most apparent in its illustration of remembrance, where protagonists struggle to adequately commemorate their dead and consign them to history.

However, as Alexandra Walsham suggests, the Reformation's influence on collective memory went beyond remembrance of the dead, it also constituted a broader rejection of England's troublesome past. The Reformation obliterated "a large portion of the medieval past", in the physical destruction of Catholic churches and monuments and the suppression of ideas and practices associated with its history (Walsham "History, Memory, and the English Reformation" 907). Walsham confirms that the injunctions demanding the destruction of Catholic paraphernalia extended to private homes, to ensure that 'no memory of the same' remained to perpetuate the besotted in the misguided ways of their forefathers" (Walsham "History, Memory, and the English Reformation" 907-9). This thesis explores how these temporal ruptures can be observed in the conventions of revenge tragedy. The influence of the Reformation's "eradication of

commerce" between the dead and the living (and consequently the past and the present) on early modern tragedy has been a productive inquiry and a critical field that has been increasingly explored in recent years (Anderson 126). Stephen Mullaney's *The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare* (2015) and Thomas P Anderson's *Performing Early Modern Trauma from Shakespeare to Milton* (2016) both explore motifs of problematic and traumatic memory expressed in sixteenth-century theatre and Thomas Rist writes specifically on how the Reformation's reworking of remembrance influenced revenge tragedy in *Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration in Reforming England* (2008).

In this thesis, I draw on several related but distinct critical fields to inform my study of revenge tragedy and its preoccupation with inheritance and legacy. The argument of the thesis considers how peaceful, lineal continuity is disrupted and disturbed in these plays, influenced by changing understandings of justice, of heritage and natural succession, and the Reformation's eradication of England's Catholic past. Mullaney articulates how the "trauma of reform" created ruptures in the social fabric, that were explored in the drama of the period:

> Tragedy as a mode of social thought seems purpose-built for traumas of reform such as these. It is historical consciousness in performance […] (Mullaney *The Reformation of Emotions* 8; Mullaney "Politics of Attention" 159).

There is some debate as to whether tragedy, in its preoccupation with remembrance and rituals of commemoration, sought to compensate for the ruptures left by the Reformation's "rage against the dead" by substituting ritual for performance, or to contain them by exposing their futility (Marshall *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* 93; Karremann 69). I would suggest that while the plays of this study demonstrate the dangers of holding on to the past for individuals, they also highlight the necessity of integrating the past for the collective. Although, for the protagonists of this study, excessive remembrance invariably leads to isolation and ruin, their actions are almost always instigated by a communal rejection of memory and understanding, by the court or by public institutions. A collective desire for continuity, to contain the trauma of the past by integrating it into a systematic and linear narrative, is foregrounded as the only conceivable way to avoid cycles of destructive repetition. Thomas P. Anderson suggests

that the medium of theatre was crucial to this longing for collective memory, on the stage and in the auditorium, and that drama assisted in "the shift to a social and national memory that ordered the unruly past in attempts to overcome it" (Anderson 6). Of course, the integration of a violent and traumatic past is rarely a peaceful process in these plays. Revenge narratives frequently open in the aftermath of war (*Thyestes*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus, Richard III*) and this contextual framework neatly illustrates how the "memory of a traumatic past […] insistently presses its claim on the present" (Anderson 1). When Titus returns from battle at the start of *Titus Andronicus* it is ostensibly a retirement to a peaceful Rome ("Give me a staff of honour for mine age, / But not a sceptre to control the world"), but it is quickly evident that violence is not resolved, and the impact of war reverberates and repeats throughout the action of the play (*TA*. I. i. 201-2).

In revenge tragedy, we see how both the "silencing" of troublesome memory and enforced remembrance can be starkly violent processes (Karremann 11). One recurring trope of enforced remembrance in the genre is the performative indictment or the unveiling of a body, such as the revealing of the dead Horatio in Hieronimo's staging of *Soliman and Perseda* and the public execution of his assailants. Hieronimo demands remembrance for the son that was forgotten in dramatizing his vengeance on his murderers and revealing the "spectacle" of his "butchered […] boy" (*TST.* IV. iv. 88; 105). The loss of speech can also be a powerful illustration of the silencing of memory, such as we see in Hieronimo's biting out of his tongue and refusing to tell his story, or in the brutalised, mute Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*. Isabel Karremann suggests that remembering and forgetting are "complementary forces rather than mutually exclusive opposites" and describes how a collective understanding of "cultural memory" in drama of the period incorporates both concepts into an edited version of history (Karremann 7). Richard III is a good example of this desire for edited memory, as one who strives to construct and impose his own rewriting of the past but loses his allies, and ultimately fails to cement his narrative into a collective history. We also see elements of this selective memory in the rather contrived revenge in *The Revenger's Tragedy,* where scraps of remembrance are cursorily provided, and unconvincingly integrated, into Vindice's plans for the purgation and reconstruction of the Italian court. There is a certain amount of ambivalence surrounding remembrance in these texts, where value is placed on a

collective commemoration that enables an individual to forget. We see this ambivalence in the burial of Titus' sons;

> TITUS: Let it be so, and let Andronicus
> Make this his latest farewell to their souls.
> *[Sound trumpets, and lay the coffin in the tomb.]*
> In peace and honour rest you here my sons;
> Rome's readiest champions, repose you here in rest,
> Secure from worldly chances and mishaps […] (*TA.* I. i. 155).

The ritual of remembrance allows Titus to forget, to "make this his latest farewell" and to make peace with their loss and integrate their deaths into the narrative of the future, where he envisions Lavinia shall "[…] live, outlive [her] father's days, / And fame's eternal date, for virtue's praise" (I. i. 170-1). Tamora of course is afforded no such ritual for Alarbus, and the impact of Titus' refusal reverberates and repeats in her desire for revenge. This sense of constructive, and *constructed* memory, what Karremann terms "cultural memory", frequently emerges in the "tell my story" endings of revenge plays, where the collective desire for continuity and cohesion is conferred to narrative memory in efforts to avoid the repetition of destructive patterns. This desire to avoid repetition can be seen in the genre's exploration of legacy and memory, where storytelling endings ("[…] bear his pretty tales in mind / And talk of them when he was dead and gone") often go hand in hand with declamations on healing political divides ("[…] May I govern so / To heal Rome's harms and wipe away her woe") (*Titus Andronicus*. V. iii. 164-5; 146-7). I argue that the linearity of narrative memory succeeds primogeniture in these plays, and that storytelling is presented as the sole, potential source of continuity in a damaged and fractured world.

Why have I focused on inheritance and legacy in revenge tragedy?

The structure of revenge tragedy exhibits an inescapable preoccupation with the past; its format is immersed in retrospectives, in mourning the dead, in the settling of debts, and with the reparation of wrongs. I argue that these core elements are interrelated with, and compounded by tropes of inheritance, legacy, and temporality. While there have been other studies that have touched upon these themes,[3] to date there has not yet been

[3] Amongst others, Linda Woodbridge analyses the economy of debt in revenge tragedy in *English Revenge Drama: Money, Resistance, Equality* (2010), R. L. Kesler has some interesting

a sustained examination of the prevalence of these tropes within the revenge genre and the impact of contemporary religious and political upheaval on their development. The intention of this thesis is to explore how detailed analysis of these motifs can reveal new insights into the study of revenge drama.

As we have discussed, the narrative of revenge frequently involves a struggle to consign the dead to memory, the protagonist holds on to the "active" or "living" part of the dead person in their motivation for vengeance. In so doing a protagonist "keeps his own wounds green", becoming trapped and isolated in pursuit of the past (Bacon 348). Francis Bacon foregrounds the retroactivity of revenge in his essays, highlighting the traumatic difficulty of letting go of the "irrevocable": "[t]hat which is past is gone […] and wise men have enough to do with things present and to come; therefore, they do but trifle with themselves, that labour in past matters" (Bacon 347). Hieronimo attempts to use his position at court in *The Spanish Tragedy* to illustrate the past that has haunted him but discovers that his place within the wider narrative has been skewed and that he now exists in isolation, external to his context. Kesler suggests that "The irony of tragedy is that, while it helped to construct the very circumstances that made a concept such as 'history' possible, it could function within that history only as an artefact of the past" (Kesler 495). This is also true of characters such as Hieronimo (and his theatrical descendants): in their dogged attempts to "right" the past, they are pushed to the peripherals of their temporal context and eventually become extraneous. Jasper Heywood's addition to the plot of *Thyestes* encapsulates this isolation, where the eponymous protagonist steps outside of the narrative to appeal to the gods for death and resolution: "Why gap'st thou not? Why do you not, O gates of hell, unfold?" (*Thy*. V. iv. 47). Upon the realisation that they have outlived their own narrative, the revenger must die, and be consigned to history in the re-telling of their story.

In *The Strangeness of Tragedy,* Paul Hammond identifies "tragic time" as the space occupied by a protagonist consumed by the events of the past:

> Protagonists never quite inhabit their present: their time, like their space, decomposes, for as we are aware that an event in the present

insights into revenge and temporality in *Time and Causality in Renaissance Revenge Tragedy* (1990), and Tom McFaul explores patrilineal succession anxieties in *Problem Fathers in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (2012).

> has roots in the past, this past is brought into the present in a way which disturbs it, troubling it and undoing its coherence without ever making those causes and origins accessible for confrontation or repair (Hammond 7-8).

I think this description has particular significance for revenge tragedy, for the genre stresses the sense of imbalance and the strength of the desire to restore an order of the past, just out of reach. The avengers frequently seek to replicate the crime in reverse, "restaging" the past in attempt to restore this balance, and to be "released" from the temporal suspension they find themselves in (Hammond 68). However, invariably, the desire to expunge, amend, and neutralise the crimes of the past is shown to be a futile one, and the audience are aware from the conventions of the genre that the avenger must die once the debt has been repaid. They have become so consumed by the past that there is no longer a place for them in the present.

This fractured sense of the future is another way in which the genre interacts with time in an interesting way. Many of the plots centre around a gap in the chronological line of succession, whether this be a child (Thyestes, Hieronimo, Titus) or a father (Vindice, Hamlet), or even a competitor (Richard) and like the Greek and Roman protagonists who lived under the hereditary curse, the traumatic disruption of linearity that accompanies revenge yields a similar outcome. When Thyestes loses his sons, it is made clear that he has lost his stake in the future of the kingdom, and the loss of children in revenge drama frequently represents this loss of futurity. The protagonist is prevented from moving forward, held in stasis, paralysed by what has gone before, and consequently consigned to history. The "tell my story" ending of most revenge tragedies reflect this, for it illustrates how their tale is, even in their dying breaths, being written into, and *adapted* for, the historical narrative that shall outlive them.

The revenge plots I examine in this thesis are littered with references to the futurity of heirs and anxieties surrounding fathers who have been displaced, and usurped, by their future selves. There is an inherent ambivalence in the optimism of heirs, and the apprehension surrounding usurpers we see in the genre. Paternity in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus* dwells on what is left for a father, as the "original source and fountain" of the family unit, once he has lost his children (Walsham "History, Memory, and the English Reformation" 901). In contrast to this metaphor of stability, maternity is

often presented alongside tropes of indulgence, unpredictability and sexual insatiability; Tamora embodies these stereotypes as the sole maternal representative in *Titus Andronicus*, and the analogous corruptibility and sexual immorality of Gratiana is a major theme in *The Revenger's Tragedy.* Christopher Crosbie argues that "*Titus Andronicus* exhibits a preoccupation with fixing moderation – both in the sense of locating and repairing – for it imagines a world in which immoderation threatens to become the norm" and I would argue that the paternal/maternal divide is frequently presented in parallel to this in the texts of this study (Crosbie "Philosophies of Retribution" 12). Tom McFaul argues in *Problem Fathers in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama,* that the traditional function of the father-figure in family drama is to be a "stay" on the action, a role in which revenge tragedy protagonists usually fail spectacularly: "[t]he result of this is that fathers are or ought to be comforting figures in these tragedies, but begin to have an almost meta-tragic awareness of their own status as non-agents" (MacFaul 20).

The confusing desire for, and threat of, paternal obsolescence pervades the majority of the revenge themes discussed in this thesis, culminating in the strange relationship Vindice has with his father in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, in which the death of the father is presented as a nominal cause for vengeance, only to be promptly forgotten. Vindice's father is symbolic of a reportedly more honourable (yet indeterminate) past in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and Middleton highlights the intangible nature of his role within the narrative as part of his broader commentary on the genre. But the complex dynamic between fathers and sons as simultaneous mirrors of one another, and uncanny competitors in revenge tragedy is repeatedly complicated by the roles of wives, mothers, and daughters. In allegorical parallel with the renewed focus on The Fall, Eve's transgression, and "disorderly" women in Protestant England,[4] female characters frequently interrupt and circumvent the "natural progression" between father and son in these narratives (Crowther 99).[5] Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the female characters

[4] For a more detailed discussion of this renewed focus, see Mary E. Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (2004), and Kathleen M. Crowther, *Adam and Eve in the Protestant Reformation* (2010).

[5] The tendency of female characters to influence and interrupt is not always presented as negative. *Richard III* presents a fractured patrimonial succession, all the women are leftovers, causalities of its haste and ferocity, and yet their attempted interventions in Richard's schemes are born out of their desire to quell the storm and return the kingdom to peace. I say more on this in chapter three.

are symbolic of surplus and debris in these tales of inheritance and succession: in *Titus Andronicus* Tamora is a remnant of the Roman/Goth war, Margaret is the uncanny spectre of the Wars of the Roses in *Richard III*, and Gratiana is the impoverished widow with no place in society in *The Revenger's Tragedy.* Yet interestingly, it is often the female characters that actively and defiantly divert the patriarchal current of these plays.

Eileen Jorge Allman confirms that despite the genre's reputation for misogyny, the female characters of revenge tragedy frequently defy their stereotypes:

> Contempt and idealization may form the defining extremes of the Jacobean attitude towards women, but in revenge tragedy they are not inextricably linked and they are certainly not the same. Female characters are idealized not when they still their voices but when they raise them, when they cast off their presumed social subjection and assume authority (Allman 18-19).

We see this in several of the plays of this study. While the rhetoric of revenge narratives is often steeped in misogyny (*The Revenger's Tragedy* being the most overt example of this), and the female characters are conventionally placed in submissive and subordinate roles, their voices frequently seek to overcome their suppression. Bel-Imperia is both the devoted, heartbroken lover and an active participant in Hieronimo's violent revenge, Tamora is the grief-stricken mother and the insatiable assassin of the Andronici, Margaret carries her own bloody legacy from *Henry VI 1-3* but is the principal adversary to Richard's violent ascent to power. While the female characters are predictably written out of the plays' patrilineal structure, they assert their influence in their ability to disrupt and circumvent the legacies of such structures. While fathers and sons are the principal players of revenge narratives, mothers and mother-figures have a significant role to play in the genre's preoccupation with inheritance and legacy.

Which texts I have chosen for this study?

The progenitor of revenge tragedy is frequently considered to be Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, with many critics retrospectively referring to the traditional conventions and plot structure of a revenge play as the "Kydian formula" (Bowers 132). Numerous studies of revenge tragedy have taken Kyd's play as their starting point, exploring these conventions into the early seventeenth-century in the work of William Shakespeare, Thomas Middleton, George Chapman, John Webster, and Cyril Tourneur.

However, in this study I have chosen to start a little earlier, beginning with the roots of revenge tragedy in the Inns of Court drama. I begin with the Senecan translations and the Senecan-inspired plays of the 1560s, looking in particular at Jasper Heywood's *Thyestes*, alongside extracts from Alexander Neville's *Oedipus* and Norton and Sackville's *Gorboduc*. The translations of the 1560s have been relatively ignored in the revenge tragedy trajectory, but I feel their inclusion is important for my study as the direct translations of Seneca's work for the Inns of Court provide some illuminating insights into the classical themes that particularly resonated with early modern writers, and how these went on to shape the revenge genre. Previous studies have used Kyd's play as either the end-point of Senecan tragedy on the English stage, or the starting point of a new tradition of revenge tragedy; I would like to explore this transition a little further and look at the developing significance of inheritance and legacy tropes either side of this development.

The following chapters work chronologically through the 1560s to the early 1600s, from the late Elizabethan to early Jacobean reign, and demonstrate how the authors build upon the work of their predecessors and how themes of inheritance and legacy evolve and expand within the genre. This time-period captures the first wave of revenge tragedy, and spans the fractious atmosphere surrounding inheritance as England confronted the prospect of the death of Elizabeth without a natural heir. Some consider the conclusion of the genre to have been Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606), which exhibits an increasingly substantive crossover into tragicomedy, or Cyril Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy* (1609) which presents as a kind of "anti-revenge" play; and some believe the genre to have survived much longer, into the mid-seventeenth century, with plays such as John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633), and Middleton's *Women Beware Women* (c. 1621). Owing to the confines of this study, I take *The Revenger's Tragedy* as my concluding text in this thesis, as it provides some interesting insights into perceptions of conclusion and legacy, while providing a clear and definitive demonstration of some of the upcoming changes on the English stage, particularly in its penchant for parody and metatheatre.

The revenge mode did not develop in isolation, and consequently I have chosen to broaden by search to include texts on the peripheries of the revenge genre for this in-depth study of inheritance and legacy (themes which are particularly prominent in, but not necessarily confined to a strict interpretation of, revenge drama). I have incorporated

a variety of texts, with some consideration of History and Tragicomedy, and covering a range of authors, inclusive of Shakespeare but not dominated by his work, and aiming to present a more rounded consideration of revenge drama within its theatrical and historical context. Taking into consideration that the genre of revenge tragedy is a relatively modern categorisation, I have chosen to include *Richard III* in my selection. David Bevington points out that the English history play was "not really a genre at all" as it conforms to none of the definitions of genre laid out in the Aristotelian tradition (Bevington 93). Correlations between the play and contemporaneous revenge plots have been noted before, with the play occasionally being described as a "variant" on the revenge tragedy theme, "manipulating and altering the structures of its historical sources" to focus attention on a Machiavellian protagonist seeking vindication and retribution (Jowett 22).

I consider these revenge parallels most apparent, and particularly pertinent, when considering inheritance and legacy. The descriptions of the War of the Roses blood-feud that plays out in Shakespeare's tetralogy bears some striking resemblances to the inherited curse sagas of Greek and Roman drama. Richard himself is preoccupied with his own inheritance and the things he feels are due to him by circumstances of his birth, yet curiously, also despite them, and the surrounding characters understand Richard as a version of the inherited curse, a type of divine retribution for all the bloodshed that has gone before. He is characterised by all those around him, but particularly by the female characters, as a type of plague, a punishment from God: "That foul defacer of God's handiwork, / Thy womb let loose, to chase us to our graves" (IV. iv. 48-9). Richard internalises these interpretations, over-steps those expectations and over-reaches his inherited position as the third son of the Yorkist line, pushing himself to the forefront of English history. I feel it is important to incorporate the history play within my discussion of inheritance in revenge tragedy, as it deals similarly with burdens of the past and the stability of an ordered succession.

The limitations of this work does not allow for a comprehensive study of all the seminal revenge plays, and so there are, inevitably, some pertinent texts that are not covered in this analysis. One obvious omission is a detailed discussion of *Hamlet.* There are two reasons for this, one being the extensive studies of the text and its relationship with revenge tragedy already available, and another being the retrospective interrogation of *Hamlet* provided in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. I felt consideration of *The Revenger's*

Tragedy and its role as a 'response' to *Hamlet* and the wider genre, was more suited to the aims of this project, enabling me to cover more ground in terms of the development of inheritance and legacy. As Crosbie points out, twentieth-century critics have frequently positioned *Hamlet* as a "standard of comparison" for other revenge texts, effectively reinforcing "*Hamlet*'s distinctiveness within the genre by positioning other plays […] as inferior reflections […] Revenge drama outside of *Hamlet*, not surprisingly, tends to receive censure for its mere sensationalism and philosophical crudeness – in short, its distance from *Hamlet*" (Crosbie "Philosophies of Retribution" 6). I feel that looking at *Hamlet* from the perspective of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, a play that came hot-on-the-heels of its predecessor, and arguably in direct competition with it, will provide me with a more constructive vantage point for looking at inheritance and legacy in the relationship between these two plays.

Overall, this study considers how changing perceptions of inheritance in the period sparked an interest in the tragedies of the past and explores the ways in which early modern dramatists engaged with historical chronology, skilfully adapting sources to create something new and pertinent for the audience. The revenge protagonists I examine in the following chapters seek to restore an image of a utopic past that becomes fragmented under closer inspection. Revenge heroes such as Hieronimo and Titus, become absorbed in retrospect, and their mementos become visual representatives of their failure to incorporate the past into a future that moves further and further away. Anti-heroes, such as Richard III and Atreus, seek to push forward into a future of "absolution", a type of apocalyptic blank-slate, but they too, find it slipping through their fingers. Both find themselves suspended between two worlds, which is perhaps evocative of the "interperiod" of the Renaissance, where authors and audiences no doubt found themselves wondering how the "newly invented" past might be assimilated into an emerging future (Howard 22; Hillman 18). The first chapter considers the early modern translations of Seneca's tragedies published in the 1560s, with particular attention given to Jasper Heywood's *Thyestes* (1560). It focuses on the thematic recurrence of maternity and pseudo-maternity tropes in Heywood's translation and how this may have been influenced by the intensity of the succession debate in the mid sixteenth century. This chapter also reflects on how Heywood's Catholicism may have influenced the maternity motifs of his text, looking at the Reformation's changing iconography of the feminine and

how this is foregrounded in Heywood's translation of his classical source. The conclusion contemplates how the translations of Seneca's work sparked new interest in the tragic tradition amongst early modern authors and how this resulted in the popularity of the vernacular, neo-Senecan style.

The second chapter looks at Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1587) and William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (c. 1588) as two relatively early examples of revenge tragedy and two of the most frequently performed and referenced (Woodbridge 4; Weber 701-2). Specifically, I explore how the plays inherit, and adapt, classical sources and, particularly, how they explore the notion of inherited speech. Clearly, both plays incorporate excerpts of Latin and classical references into their narrative, but they also explore the boundaries of words and the voice of the individual. Inherited and appropriated speech becomes increasingly problematised for the protagonists, who search for meaning in classical precedents but ultimately fail to understand or take ownership of their contribution to the broader narrative. Lavinia's personhood is violated when her attackers remove her ability to speak, she becomes a visual signifier, piecing together what little impact she has on the world around her from a series of references and allusions. And Hieronimo refuses to speak further and bites out his own tongue at the end of *The Spanish Tragedy* when he realises his grievances and his autonomy are going unheard by those around him and he can no longer influence his narrative. This chapter explores the connections between language and autonomy, and narrative and legacy in these plays.

My third chapter considers how *Richard III,* placed within Shakespeare's first historical tetralogy, can be considered part of the revenge genre (c. 1592). The chapter discusses *Richard III*'s place as a bridge between history and tragedy, its tragic approach to heritage, and the fated downfall of the individual protagonist. In this chapter, I consider how the play's foundations in the bloody history of the Wars of the Roses overlap with the "cyclical" pattern of revenge tragedy and the classical conception of the inherited curse. The final section of the analysis considers the famous scene of retribution in *Richard III* and examines how the ghostly procession of Richard's victims relates to the notions of inheritance and legacy discussed in earlier plays. I explore how conscience is

depicted as a quasi-providential, historical record and internal judge, and presented as both moral arbiter and precursor of ruin in the play.

The final chapter of the thesis considers inherited conventions in Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606). Performed in 1606 and published in 1607, *The Revenger's Tragedy* is frequently understood as a parody of *Hamlet*, and perhaps even the genre itself, where exaggerated violence and metatheatrical commentary border on the comic ("Is there no thunder left, or is't kept up / In stock for heavier vengeance? There it goes!") (IV. ii. 196-7). While the work is now largely attributed to Middleton, the play is fundamentally anonymous and so the text has had a complicated history and relationship with legacy. This chapter considers the competing inheritance narratives in *The Revenger's Tragedy* alongside the play's role within the genre and explores how maternity tropes have developed from their early consideration by Heywood. I conclude by examining the differences in Middleton's ending of the revenge narrative and the lack of a "storytelling" culmination of events, and how this might overlap with understandings of the play as the conclusion to the genre's first phase.

Richard Hillman suggests that new understandings of the past in the sixteenth century were embedded within a "cultural fantasy of stability" and observes how this related to the expansion of historiography:

> In view of the virtual invention of English historiography in the period, one might risk a further generalisation and speak of a past newly invented as past – not only, as is often claimed and partially true, for the purposes of political propaganda, but also because the past […] came to define itself as the repository of a cultural fantasy of stability (Hillman 18).

This "cultural fantasy of stability" is evident in the protagonists' idealisation of the past, and yet the past is often a simultaneously comforting and oppressive presence in these narratives. My thesis argues that an in-depth analysis of inheritance and legacy motifs in revenge tragedy sheds new light on the development of the genre, and how it interacts with a sense of history and antecedents, with contemporary understandings of political stability, and evolving perceptions of a "[…] newly invented […] past" (Hillman 18).

1. "Let babes be murdered ill, but worse begot": maternity and mortality in Heywood's *Thyestes* and the 1560s Senecan revival

Despite the wealth of material on the classical revival in early modern drama, few scholars have addressed the works of the early modern translators, and as Jessica Winston observes, those that have, generally concentrate on "the aesthetic qualities of the translations and adaptations" (Winston 31). The relevance of classical tragedy for early modern translators and their linguistic and literary choices in adapting the material for a contemporary audience has been relatively neglected in the field. A modern distaste for "lurid rhetoric" has largely placed Seneca's tragedies out of favour, and critics have repeatedly dismissed them as crude, "derivative copies" of their Greek predecessors (Miola 6; Bartsch and Wray 3). Even *Thyestes,* frequently cited as Seneca's best work,[6] and one for which no Greek original survives, is found wanting in elegance and sophistication. In *Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy,* Frank Lucas describes *Thyestes* as more "mental pathology than drama":

> The plot is as simple as revolting; Thyestes has seduced the wife of Atreus and tried to usurp his throne; Atreus in return feeds him on the flesh of his own children (Lucas 61).

Early modern Senecan translations suffered from the negative perception of their source material throughout the twentieth century. Despite Bill Rees' 1969 commentary on the importance of the translator, in which he describes the translator as a "midwife assisting at the birth of English Drama", few modern scholars have written on the Senecan translations, generally preferring to examine original composition over translation (Rees 133; Woodbridge "Tudor Seneca" 115). In recent years, Senecan scholarship has re-emerged, and the focus has shifted from Seneca's shortcomings in comparison with his Greek predecessors to the value of Seneca's plays in their own right. The notion of selfhood in Seneca and Roman drama more widely has become a popular topic of

[6] *Thyestes* has attracted the most critical attention of the Senecan corpus. Alessandro Schiesaro describes it as "Seneca's best" standing out "among the other plays of Seneca precisely because it mobilises […] the archetypal connection between tragedy and violence, power, sacrifice" (Schiesaro 1).

discussion,[7] and some critics have argued that this perspective has revived literary and philosophical interest in Seneca's works in the twenty-first century (A. A. Long 21).

The popularity of Seneca in the sixteenth century produced a "flurry" of Senecan translations and Senecan-inspired narratives, and to what extent the work of these dramatists can be considered independently from those which preceded and succeeded them is a source of debate amongst critics (Ker and Winston "Elizabethan Seneca" 2). Jessica Winston argues that the 1560s embodied a "distinctive moment", "politically, legally, and socially", producing the intensely insular literary environment of the Inns of Court, where authors and playwrights, wrote closely, with obvious reference to one another and a shared classical inheritance (Jessica Winston *Lawyers at Play* 18). For this reason, the texts have frequently been studied in isolation from the commercial tragedy that succeeded them, and primarily as examples of the developing intellectual and literary tastes of the mid sixteenth-century. Building on the work of Ker and Winston, this thesis suggests that the Senecan translations and adaptations that emerged in the 1560s are more than exercises in intellectual prowess. I argue that they merit literary analysis in their own right, and can reveal as much about the period in which they were written as they do about the classical world they describe. This chapter will show how the decisions of the authors and translators, working with classical texts, betray strikingly contemporary political concerns, placing particular emphasis on themes of succession, pregnancy, and the political chaos of a kingdom without heirs.

Heywood's *Thyestes* has been described as the "most important Senecan translation" of the period, with some believing it to be "one of the most important documents proving the existence of an early […] Elizabethan Renaissance" (Ker and Winston "Elizabethan Seneca" 3; Pincombe "Tragic Inspiration" 531). Heywood's work is largely faithful to the original text, aside from the additions of the Preface and the final scene (Ker and Winston "Elizabethan Seneca" 40). The text evidences a more direct style of translation compared with Heywood's previous work in *Troas,* the failings of which he largely blames on errors made by the printers (Preface. 116-34). Several critics have

[7] See Cedric Littlewood "Seneca's Thyestes: The Tragedy with No Women?" (2004), Brad Inwood, *Reading Seneca: Stoic philosophy at Rome* (2009), and Christopher Gill "Seneca and selfhood: integration and disintegration" (2009).

discussed the influence of *Thyestes* in particular, as a significant model for Renaissance tragedy.[8] Although I reference other works in this chapter, including Heywood's *Troas*, Alexander Neville's *Oedipus,* and Norton and Sackville's *Gorboduc*, I have chosen to focus my analysis on *Thyestes,* firstly because of the text's influence on tragic convention and themes of revenge in the period, and secondly because Heywood's relatively direct translation style makes the significance of his changes all the more compelling. In the following analysis I hope to demonstrate how repeated allusions to pregnancy, birth, and sterility are embedded within Seneca's bloodthirsty tale of vengeance and betrayal and explore some of the political and religious implications of Heywood's imagery in the mid sixteenth century.

One area of contemporary political concern that has been relatively well explored in the translations is how the plays address kingship and tyranny.[9] A.J. Boyle asserts that Seneca's depiction of Atreus in *Thyestes* was "the single most important model for Renaissance tyranny" and Jessica Winston argues that the overarching theme in Senecan tragedy is the "psychology of tyrants and their subjects" (Boyle 169; Jessica Winston "English Seneca" 478). Thomas More considered the Reformation, with its positioning of the monarch as the head of the church, and its disregard for the sacraments, for the saints and for the Pope, a type of "legally endorsed tyranny" as it focused all the political, moral, and religious authority in a single individual, and the drama of the period frequently made manifest the "irredeemable consequences" that follow from the "embodiment of sovereignty in a single person" (Fenlon 455; Cavanagh "Political Tragedy" 491). This chapter will focus on one particular aspect of sovereignty and kingship in *Thyestes*: that of the succession and the securing of legitimate heirs. My analysis shall consider how fears around the concentration of power in one, isolated individual overlapped with, and accentuated, political preoccupations with the

[8] See Eric Dodson-Robinson "Reading Others: Ethical Contagio in Seneca's Thyestes" (2010), Mike Pincombe "Tragic Inspiration in Jasper Heywood's translation of Seneca's Thyestes: Melpomene or Megaera?" (2012), Alessandro Schiesaro *The Passions in Play: Thyestes and the Dynamics of Senecan Drama* (2003) and Jessica Winston "English Seneca: Heywood to Hamlet" in *Elizabethan Seneca: Three Tragedies* (2009; 2012).
[9] See James Kerr and Jessica Winston *Elizabethan Seneca: Three Tragedies* (2012), Jessica Winston "English Seneca: Heywood to Hamlet" (2009), Frank Lucas *Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy* (2009), and Linda Woodbridge "Resistance Theory Meets Drama: Tudor Seneca" (2010).

succession, with continuity, and the stability of "natural inheritance". Marriage and the succession were high on the political agenda from Elizabeth's coronation in 1558, after the death of her half siblings Edward and Mary without children, and the period saw many efforts to find Elizabeth a spousal match to ensure the birth of healthy heirs; a concern exacerbated by Elizabeth's brush with death from a smallpox infection in 1562. At the time *Thyestes* was written, parliament still hoped, and indeed expected, Elizabeth would bear children and preserve the Protestant line, and Heywood's text explores some of the contradictions in the public perception of maternity and birth in the period. I will argue that *Thyestes* is a play preoccupied with genealogy, descendants and the perversion of the "natural" line. For just as Heywood "inherits" his subject matter from Seneca, his translation foregrounds "natural" and problematised notions of inheritance in the play.

The "natural" line, patrimony, and succession are all familiar tropes in both Classical and Renaissance tragedy and, one might argue, to be expected of a play such as *Thyestes.* However, while this is true (*Thyestes* is after all, a play about brothers, sons, fathers and grandfathers), what might be less expected is that Heywood's translation is also heavy with allusion to maternity and birth. The notion of inheritance in *Thyestes* draws on transgressional imagery, not only of the familial, regal or political, but also of the physical. The tragedy concerns itself with the metaphorical notion of royal blood, but also with the bloody, physicality of birth and the consequences of its contamination, perversion and inversion. Alessandro Schiesaro argues in *The Passions in Play*:

> Atreus' revenge is not primarily motivated by issues of power, even if eliminating his nephews strengthens the dynastic position of his own offspring. The deep-seated causes of Atreus' anger and violence are Thyestes' incestuous relationship with Aerope and the consequent uncertainty about the true paternity of Agamemnon and Menelaus (Schiesaro 5).

This analysis suggests that while *Thyestes* is often discussed in reference to its depiction of megalomaniac, patriarchal rule, its preoccupation with birth and progeny and the securing of continuity via legitimate heirs has been relatively overlooked. The two are inextricably linked in *Thyestes*, for it is first-and-foremost the insecurity of his succession that sparks Atreus' descent into unbridled tyranny. In John G. Fitch's translation and commentary, he considers the play's central theme to be "tantalising, insatiable desire" and particularly the desire for power (Fitch 219). However, I would propose that the

compulsion to out-do what has been done, and in so doing, un-do what has been done seems much more prominent. Atreus' desire for *maius nefas* ("greater horror") is instilled in him from the prologue and while references are made to Atreus wishing to maintain his position of present power, the play appears fundamentally preoccupied with exceeding the crimes of the past in an attempt to restore balance and secure the future of the royal line.

This chapter examines how specific, contemporary anxieties surrounding inheritance and legacy were assimilated into the classically-inspired, violent narratives of the early modern stage. More specifically, it demonstrates the ways in which Heywood's adaptation of Seneca's *Thyestes* explores some key concerns of the 1560s, and foregrounds contemporary political anxieties surrounding the succession, bloody and bodily inheritance, and temporal, biological, and political instability. I argue that while relatively critically neglected, the theatre of the 1560s explores some of these anxieties surrounding power and isolation, order and discord, in particularly interesting ways and consider how the beginnings of revenge tragedy are revealed in these early works (Cavanagh "Political Tragedy" 488). My analysis is split into four sections; the first is a contextual analysis of the translations and the ways in which they interact with the succession debate in the mid sixteenth century. The second section provides a close analysis of *Thyestes* and examines how contemporary ideas on pregnancy and birth are incorporated into Heywood's translation of Seneca's male-dominated play. I will then explore in more detail how Heywood's Catholicism may have influenced his depiction of maternal imagery and the "swerving state" of Mycenae. The analysis concludes with a detailed discussion of how depictions of political and familial chaos converge with tropes of sterility and impotency in *Thyestes.* Overall, the chapter will demonstrate how notions of the familial past (genealogy) and familial future (succession) pervade Heywood's translation of *Thyestes* and consider how these themes were adapted for an early modern audience.

Translation and succession

Despite its varied reputation with modern scholars, the admiration of Senecan drama in the Renaissance is in no critical dispute, with many concluding that Seneca "defined the paradigm of Classical tragedy" in the period (Ker and Winston "Elizabethan

Seneca" 5). There were several aspects of Seneca's drama and philosophical writing that appealed to an early modern audience. In *English Drama before Shakespeare*, Peter Happé concludes that the Elizabethans attributed great importance to Seneca's work on moral grounds, and Emily Wilson asserts that Seneca's "punchy [and] aphoristic" writing style attracted interest from sixteenth-century rhetoricians (Happé 102; Wilson 219-20). Increased scholarly interest in classical tragedy began to emerge in the 1550s, as authors and playwrights noted how the political and communal aspects of tragedy, alongside the spectacle and melodrama, had the potential to pique the public interest in a fresh way. The dramatic tropes of tyranny and misrule that permeate classical tragedy resonated with public anxieties about mishandled monarchical power and early modern authors used these comparisons in their translations and original works, referring and deferring to the classical past for guidance and advice.

The Inns of Court were medieval institutions for legal tuition that provided classical literary and philosophical tuition, alongside a legal education and Seneca was certainly one of the most widely-read authors within the Universities and Inns by the mid-sixteenth century (Lucas 100). The Inns would have been influential for Heywood as the "epicentre of the early English translation movement" in the 1560s, and there is some evidence to show that he lived at Gray's Inn with his uncle William Rastell, and alongside fellow translator Alexander Neville for a period of time (Perry 311; Flynn "Jasper Heywood (1535–1598)"). Literary historians frequently consider the institutions to have "laid the foundations of an English musical and dramatic tradition", particularly in the style of *imitatio* and the adaptation of classical models (Baker 14; Knight 220). J. H. Baker confirms in "The Third University 1450-1550" that scholars of the Inns would typically have been the eldest sons of the English gentry, sent to be schooled in law and other "polite accomplishments" such as music, dancing and sports (Baker 9;14). Students of the Inns also benefitted from a professional community and networking opportunities, not only in legal circles but in literary ones too. As Sarah Knight points out in "Literature and Drama at the early modern Inns of Court" "a two-way traffic of authorship and influence ran between the Inns and the public theatres, which proved pivotal in shaping the Inns drama" (Knight 217-18). Heywood was one of a number of contemporary Latin translators associated with the Inns, several of whom he mentions and pays tribute to in the preface of *Thyestes*, where with affected modesty, Heywood tells of his honour and surprise at

Seneca, the “worthy wight” “lodged among the muses nine” foregoing his peers and selecting Heywood to renew his name in English (Preface 20-2).

The mid-sixteenth century saw a burst of interest in the work of Seneca and all ten of his tragedies were translated from Latin in a period of just over twenty years, with nine published between 1559 and 1567. Heywood published the first three translations, *Troas* in 1559, *Thyestes* in 1560, and *Hercules Furens* in 1561, followed by Alexander Neville’s *Oedipus* in 1563 and John Studley’s *Agamemnon and Medea* in 1566. The Elizabethans understood Seneca as a philosopher “whose plays offered an education in moral and political conduct” and translation as not only an academic exercise in Latin grammar, but an innovative, creative practice and a method of networking within a literary social circle (Lucas 482; Ker and Winston "Elizabethan Seneca" 5). The prefatory materials to the translations include many references to the Inns and contemporary writers, translators or patrons associated with the literary community. Dedications to the texts are often filled with flattery and were presented as gifts for influential figures. Yet, while English was still considered by many “far unable to compare with Latin” in its ability to express lofty and philosophical ideas, the practice of translation for educational purposes was considered a worthy pursuit, and an interest Heywood and his contemporaries shared with the young Princess Elizabeth (Tro. Pref. 25-7; Flynn *John Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility* 41).[10]

Alongside the practicality of professional networking, the translations served another social function in their ability to improve the accessibility of Latin texts for an English-speaking reader and address political and cultural concerns of the time (Jessica Winston "English Seneca" 482; Woodbridge *English Revenge Drama* 154). As demonstrated by the prevalence of his works, the concerns of Seneca in the first century clearly resonated with Elizabethans. As Frank Lucas observes, this was likely connected to public unease over the recent memory of, and the potentially imminent, insecurity of state: “English drama could find nothing in Classics so near its own level as the declining senility of Rome […]” (Lucas 108). The work of the translators treads a fascinatingly fine

[10] As asserted by Ker and Winston in *Elizabethan Seneca: Three Tragedies* (2012), Heywood likely shared an education at Court with Princess Elizabeth where both would have been schooled in Latin translation. In *Women and Tudor Tragedy: Feminizing Counsel and Representing Gender* (2013), Allyna Ward confirms that part of Seneca’s *Hercules Oetaeus* attributed to Elizabeth survives at the Bodleian Library.

line of communicating classical ideas and adapting those ideas for a contemporary audience. As Winston and Kerr observe, *Troas* "began a vogue for translating and adapting Seneca that lasted through the 1560s and influenced later Elizabethan dramatists, who were to treat the Senecan tragic corpus as a reservoir of themes and devices that could be tailored to the popular stage" (Winston and Ker 564-5). Yet the creative restraints of translating someone else's work renders the adaptations and additions made by the author all the more interesting and significant in their intent; the voice of the translator can be heard in those lines and passages where the source falls short of expressing precisely what they have to say. Translation in the sixteenth century was not as precise a practice as we would understand it to be today and where modern translators would seek to be as faithful as possible to the original and minimise their input in the text, early modern translators sought to invest themselves into their work. In this sense, the purpose of early modern translation was considered to be rather more creative than exacting. In his Preface to *Troas,* Heywood describes not only elaborating on the source material to interpret "all points of the author's mind", but also correcting certain aspects of the text he believed to be imperfections (*Tro*. Pref. 22; 33). As Stuart Gillespie asserts in *English Translation and Classical Reception*, "for early modern translators, not only is the appropriative nature of the translations which they carry out a good thing, appropriation is one of the primary ends of translation" (Gillespie 36). Winston and Ker suggest that Heywood is "most active as an interpreter when he seeks to convey that the play can teach a lesson" and I would agree that this is the case, for, while Heywood often inserts lines or syllables for the sake of structure (and most often for rhyme), I argue that his careful and meticulous linguistic substitutions in *Thyestes* are crucial to understanding the sixteenth-century interest in the text (Ker and Winston *Elizabethan Seneca* 28).

Although existing work on the translations has concentrated primarily on their political intent with regard to tyranny, it seems clear that the texts also contain some stark messages with regard to procreation and succession, speaking almost alarmingly directly to an unmarried Queen in her childbearing years.[11] An enduring hope that royal children would save England from descending into the chaos that had come before, made the succession one of the most prominent concerns of Elizabeth's government from the very

[11] Heywood's translations were published between 1559 and 1563, the first of which was dedicated to Elizabeth, who would have been 26 or 27 at the time.

start of her reign. As Lisa Hopkins asserts in *Drama and Succession to the Crown 1561-1633,* the topic of marriage and succession became so contentious throughout the sixteenth century, that by the later years of Elizabeth's reign it was "utterly forbidden" (Hopkins 1). The legitimacy of Mary and Elizabeth was confirmed and refuted in three Acts of Succession: the first, in 1533, declared Elizabeth heir to the throne and Mary illegitimate after Henry VIII's divorce, the second, in 1536, declared both Mary and Elizabeth illegitimate after the execution of Anne Boleyn, and the third, in 1543, placed both Mary and Elizabeth in line for the throne behind the future Edward VI. In "The Quest for a King", Anne McLaren reasons that the instability of the law on this issue led to Elizabeth's decision to forbid any further discussion "lest those debates lead to a resolution that invalidated her queenship" (McLaren 281). The Commons' petition of 1563 informed Elizabeth of the importance of the subject in the mind of the populace:

> And forasmuch as your said subjectes see nothing in this wholl esate of so great importance to your Majestie and the wholl realme, nor so necessary at this time to be reduced into a certenty, as the sure continuance of the governaunce and th'imperiall crowne thereof in your Majestie's person and the most honourable issue of your body (Hartley 90).

The lack of legitimate male heirs had fuelled the political and religious turmoil of the preceding ten years and the urgency for Elizabeth to marry and produce royal sons was a recurring theme in the proceedings of parliament. These anxieties were compounded by the prospect of the female monarch marrying a French or Spanish suitor and placing the kingdom under Papist, foreign rule. The concerns of the people and of Elizabeth's parliament on the issue were manifold and the Commons' petition did not shy away from articulating the perilous consequences should the Queen not acquiesce and marry to secure the succession:

> [G]reat daungers, the unspeakable miseires of civill warres, the perilous intermedlinges of forreyne princes with seditious, ambicious and factious subjectes at home, the wast of noble howses, the slawghter of people, subvercion of townes, intermission of all thinges perteyning to the maintenance of the realme, unsurety of all men's possessions, lives and estates, dayly interchange of atteindors and treasons: all these mischieves and infinite other most like and evident, if your Majestie shuld be taken away from us without knowen heire (Hartley 91).

The prominence of the succession question in texts of this period is striking; frequently described as the issue that "hung over them like no other", the subject was extensively covered in sixteenth-century political, religious and literary spheres (Levine 1). While almost all literary output of the day contained traces of these debates, it could be argued that tragedy is the natural home of such themes; of inheritance and legacy, of obligations and their perilous consequences. As Silke-Maria Weineck points out in *The Tragedy of Fatherhood,* paternity and succession feature so prominently in tragic texts because tragedy is devoted to the collision of power and power's demise through a "conflict whose conditions precede its proper plot" (Weineck 10). Notions of inheritance, succession and legitimacy in tragedy demonstrate the relationship between politics and domesticity, between the powerful and the wretched, and between past and future. And while this trope could be described as a convention of the genre from Classical antiquity, I argue that anxieties concerning the Tudor succession foregrounded this concern in the tragedy of the 1560s.

Heywood's contemporary, Alexander Neville, published his translation of *Oedipus* in the same year the Commons' petition was made to parliament requesting the queen "marry and limit the succession" (Collinson "Elizabeth I (1533–1603)"). Neville addresses this concern explicitly in his text and we can see this most clearly when Oedipus, upon realising that Merope was not his birth mother, questions why she would claim him as her own. The response in Latin reads simply *regum superbam liberi astringent fidem* (children secure the loyalty of haughty kings), but Neville expands on this and translates the response as:

> A Kingdom she shall gayne thereby. Her husband layde in grave,
> The chiefest prop to stay her Realmes from present confusion,
> Is children for to have: and hope of lawfull succession
> (Fitch "Oedipus" 88; *Oed*. IV.iii.).

Neville's addition emphasises the importance of royal children and the need for "lawfull succession" but most tellingly, he changes the focus of the Latin, from the significance of a royal line for "haughty kings" to the increased importance of succession for a queen desiring to "stay her Realmes from present confusion". The term "present confusion" is interesting in relation to the plot. It seems unlikely that the phrase refers to Merope's adoption of the infant Oedipus several decades earlier, or to the present time, in which

Oedipus and Jocasta, blissfully unaware, rule the Kingdom with several royal children; it appears that this reference to "present confusion" could only persuasively relate to the time of the translator and the concern over Elizabeth I's succession. The same themes reoccur in Heywood's translation of *Troas* and particularly frequently and starkly in Heywood's additions to the gruesome plot of *Thyestes.*

We also see similar concerns about a disrupted succession in Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville's original composition, *Gorboduc,* published in 1561, frequently referred to as both the "first real English tragedy" and "the earliest attempt to imitate the Senecan tragic form in English (Cauthen xiii; Walker *The Politics of Performance* 201). The play tells of a fictional British king who chooses to divide his kingdom equally between his two sons before his death, causing resentment and distrust between the pair and throughout the kingdom. Gorboduc's decision to overrule the concerns and objections of his advisors ultimately results in fratricide, infanticide and revolt. Like *Thyestes, Gorboduc* is a cautionary tale about the reverberations of action, particularly, the dangers of isolated, autocratic rule, and of the consequences of usurping the natural line of descent. The tyrannical inclinations of King Gorboduc are depicted in his decision to override all that has gone before him, and to ignore the concerns of his counsellors, in his personal desire to influence the future of his descendants. Gorboduc's decision to override patrilineal descent by dividing the kingdom in two, and to do so before "natural" time, causes frisson in the state. Ferrex usurps Porrex, and both brothers usurp their living father's rightful place, just as Thyestes usurped Atreus in the marriage bed and in the succession of the kingdom. The position (and identity) that Atreus is so desperate to regain in *Thyestes*, is wilfully given away by Gorboduc, but both plays demonstrate how either desire constitutes a perversion of the natural course of events. Philander (whose name translates as "friend of mankind") observes the dangers of disrupting linearity early on:

> That nature hath her order and her course,
> Which (being broken) doth corrupt the state
> Of minds and things, even in the best of all (Cauthen xviii; I. ii 220-2).

“The monstrous womb”: Thyestes as unnatural mother

The bloody plot of Seneca’s *Thyestes* demonstrates a similar preoccupation with usurpation and disrupted linearity and features a long-held grudge between two estranged royal brothers, Atreus and Thyestes, descendants of the cursed house of Tantalus. Atreus seeks revenge for Thyestes’ adultery with his wife Aerope and lures his brother back from exile under the pretence of reconciliation, only to murder his brother’s children and feed him the remains. The ancestral and conceptual elements of succession in *Thyestes* are underpinned by a striking exploration of its bloody physicality, and I would suggest that this is primarily depicted in Heywood’s translation in repeated tropes surrounding the perversion of maternity, birth, and royal blood.

In “Seneca’s “Thyestes”: The Tragedy with No Women?”, Cedric Littlewood observes that the play is notable as the only one of the Senecan corpus without a “major role for a woman”, with the only female influence being in the form of the fury Megaera and in the personification of Fortune (Littlewood 63). Despite her prominence in the myth, Aerope is only indirectly referenced in Seneca’s drama. This is unusual, for while Classical tragedies conventionally follow the patrilineal line, the female characters of Greek mythology such as Hecuba, Medea and Clytemnestra almost always take a prominent role in the action (Pollard "What's Hecuba to Shakespeare?" 1061). I argue that while *Thyestes* contains no central female characters, there is a definite blurring of the gender lines and much reflection on what it is to be female, and to give birth, in the language describing Thyestes, a father who becomes “fully fill” “with the heap of all his babes” (V. iii. 10).[12] While Thyestes’ role as father (and male adulterer) is crucial to the plot, his parental portrayal is consistently maternal rather than paternal. The role of the mother in pregnancy and birth is held up as a paradigm of what is “natural” and godly in contrast to the excessively “unnatural” and abhorrent actions of Thyestes. This perversion of what is pure and natural is continually implied in Seneca’s play and, as this chapter demonstrates, particularly accentuated in the language of Heywood’s translation.

[12] Tanya Pollard makes a similar point about *Hamlet* in “What’s Hecuba to Hamlet? (2012) where she argues that Hamlet’s identification with Hecuba evokes images of maternity and female fertility in a largely male-centric plot.

The perception of maternity as a symbol for purity and goodness would have been a familiar one at the time of Heywood's writing, when pregnancy and childbirth had traditionally been afforded almost miraculous status. Long-established Catholic belief associated pregnancy with the Virgin Mary and popular thought frequently allied pregnant mothers and childbirth with the Immaculate Conception. In *Vernacular Bodies* Mary Fissell explains the history of this association:

> Before the Reformation, conception and foetal development were understood in wondrous terms: every pregnancy echoed, in some small way, the miracle of Christ's taking human form. The womb was central to these ideas; it was the womb that actively transformed and developed tiny amounts of male and female seed into a new person (Fissell 3).

However, Fissell goes on to note that this traditional understanding of pregnancy was contrasted with the Reformed narrative of conception in the mid-sixteenth century, where women were taught to associate their pains in childbirth with Christ's suffering on the cross or with the punishment of Eve's sin (Fissell 47; Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn Read McPherson 135). This newly emerging philosophy meant that religious connotations of birth were redirected towards original sin and divine punishment. Unsurprisingly, these two contrasting narratives of womankind as divinely blessed or divinely condemned in mid-sixteenth century England led to "intensive social, cultural and religious concern about maternity and the maternal subject" (Kathryn M Moncrief and Kathryn R McPherson 1). While motherhood was often considered to be the salvation of women, it was also a source of suspicion in the period. Interestingly, these changing perceptions and social anxiety surrounding maternity seem to have been at their most concentrated during the time of the early modern translations and I evidence how these concerns can be traced in Heywood's lexical choices in *Thyestes*. I would argue that Heywood's translation uses pregnancy to represent the unilateral, natural course of events. When Atreus deceives his brother into corrupting and inverting pregnancy and birth by consuming his children, he subverts natural time and engenders a limbo of cyclical revenge. Robert S. Miola notes that "the spectacle of *Kindermord* had extraordinary power in the Renaissance, appearing in various forms of familial perversion" (Miola 30). Heywood's depiction of inverted birth in Thyestes' cannibalism is a form of this familial perversion, and specifically a perversion of the natural, the lineal and the genealogical, all concepts fraught with political anxiety in the period.

Heywood also figures his own literary creativity in terms of pregnancy and birth and, in the preface to *Thyestes,* describes the translation of Seneca's work as a "labour long […] that riper age doth crave" that came with "pang[s]" of pain when struggling for inspiration from the fury (Pref. 75; 332). Here the "natural" associations of maternity lend themselves to Heywood's narrative of being divinely chosen to renew Seneca's name. Heywood writes "In wondrous wise I vexed was that never man I ween / So soon after late delights in such a pang be seen" (Pref. 331-2). The Oxford English Dictionary (hereafter OED) defines "pang" as "A sudden sharp spasm of pain […] early use freq. with reference to pains of death or childbirth" ("Pang, N.1."). I would suggest that metaphor is a parody on the "delights" of sexual intimacy leading to the "pangs" of labour. Jessica Vaught asserts that the imagination was "often represented as feminine in the classical rhetorical tradition" and resulted in recurrent figurative associations between creativity and birth (Vaught 67). Vaught goes on to claim that the frequency of the metaphor was likely due to the influence of the classical rhetorician Quintilian who, in *Institutio Oratoria* wrote: "We love all the offspring of our thought at the moment of their birth; were that not so, we would never commit them to writing" (Vaught 67; Quintilian X. iii. 7). The imagination of the poet, rhetorician and translator was frequently depicted as a type of conception that, given nurturing, would bring forth literary art (Jenstad 97). A rather fitting example is Richard Jonas, who refers to his toil in translation as labour pains in the dedication of his 1540 edition of the popular midwifery manual *The Birth of Mankind:* "I have judged my labour and pains in this behalf right well bestowed" (Jonas 206). In the Preface to *Thyestes* "From the Translator to the Book" Heywood describes his work as his legacy, a metaphorical offspring sent forth into the world as his representative:

> Thou little book my messenger must be
> That must from me to wight of honour go […]
> Tell him thy name is in thy forehead writ,
> By which he shall both thee and me well know (Pref. 1-2; 23-4).

It has often been suggested that Heywood and his contemporaries used the prefatory material to their works primarily to establish networks with the influential literary names of the time, and while this is evident, we can see, more specifically, that Heywood considered his works as his proxy, his progeny and his lasting reputation. I would like to argue that contemporary preoccupations with maternity, birth, progeny and legacy, are

apparent in both Heywood's understanding of his work and in his interpretation of Seneca's Latin.

As I have stated, while Heywood's translation of *Thyestes* is largely faithful to the original, the substitutions and additions that *are* made by the translator are significant and the following section shall look at some of these changes in more detail. One pertinent example is Heywood's repeated use of the word "womb" in his English translation. The first scene refers to Tantalus' restored body as a "wondrous womb unwasted" (I. i. 12). It is likely that the "wondrous womb" Heywood refers to is Tantalus' metaphysically restored stomach; this in itself is not unusual, as the linguistic conflation of organs of the abdomen, such as the stomach, womb and bowel, was relatively common in the period (Stehling 53). However, the word "womb", derived from the middle English "wamb" meaning "stomach" or "abdomen", had medical definitions relating to the female reproductive system as early as 1450 and the OED lists the use of "womb" referring specifically to the uterus, throughout the sixteenth century and as early as 1200 ("Wōmb(E (N.) "; "Womb, N."). The use of "womb" in "wondrous womb unwasted" is an addition to the translation of *et nocte reparans quidquid amisit die* (re-grows by night what he lost by day) (Fitch "Thyeses" 231). Heywood emphasises the importance of birth, genealogy and inheritance in the prologue by compounding Seneca's reference to Tantalus' curse with the word "womb". When Heywood's Tantalus asks Megaera why she seeks to revive the "famine fixed in empty womb" we can see that "empty womb" is a substitution for the Latin *intimis agitas medullis* (my bones' marrow) (I. i. 97; Fitch 239). This is also true of Heywood's "behold this day we have to thee released, / And hunger-starvèd womb of thine we send to such a feast" which is translated from *liberum dedimus diem / tuamque ad istas solvimus mensas famem: / ieiunia exple* (we have given you a day of freedom, and released your hunger for this meal: fill up your fasting!) (I. i. 64; Fitch 235). Heywood repeatedly employs the word 'womb' to emphasise the tragic irony of what is past and what is to come. For making his son a meal, Tantalus suffers eternal hunger and repeatedly becomes "a new prepared prey" for vultures, and in ingesting his own offspring Thyestes is at once their originator and annihilator. With the use of "womb", Heywood accentuates the perversion of "natural" lineal decent, and in the chaos that ensues, Thyestes is foregrounded as the "monstrous womb, / That is of his unhappy brood become a cursed tomb" (I. i. 12; V. iv. 19-20).

We can see a preoccupation with contemporary symbolism of the womb in Heywood's translation of *Thyestes*. While the Senecan text largely plays on the word stomach with its associations of greed and the idea of consuming and being consumed, Heywood adds another dimension with maternity and the diabolical inversion of the Catholic paradigm of the "natural". In his earlier translation of *Troas*, Heywood demonstrates this reversal of birth in his depiction of Astyanax being placed in his father's tomb for safekeeping. As Heywood highlights the inverted birth analogy in Thyestes ingesting his children, he does the same when addressing Astyanax's placement in Hector's tomb. When Andromache hides little Astyanax in his father's grave, he is returned to the womb/tomb fusion that is so prevalent in Heywood's translation of *Thyestes.* It is also interesting to note that the verb "to womb" meant "to enclose" in the period and had connotations of hiding and secrecy that would have contributed to the dramatic significance of this scene ("Womb, V."). Seneca's *Trojan Women* reads *"[…] Coniugis furtum piae,/ Serva et fideli cinere victurum excipe* (safeguard your loyal wife's secret love, and receive him faithfully beside your ashes, to live) (Fitch "Trojan Women" 216-7). Heywood translates this as "in thy ashes hide thy son, preserve in tomb his life" (*Tro*. III. i. 96-7). Heywood's Andromacha asks Hector to "preserve" their child in the tomb, evoking imagery of a protective enclave fostering and protecting the life of little Astyanax. The child is effectively returned to the womb for protection, but the plan fails, and Astyanax is forcefully removed, and his young life cut short. Here again, Heywood emphasises the maternal aspect of the scene:

> ASTYNAX: Help me mother?
> ANDROMACHA: Alas my child, why tak'st thou hold by me?
> In vain thou call'st where help none is. I cannot succour thee
> (*Tro*. III. iii. 55-6).

The original reads *Quid meos retines sinus manusque matris* (Why do you hug my breast and clutch your mother's hands in useless protection?) (Fitch "Trojan Women" 240-2). The second sentence "I cannot succour thee" appears additional to the Latin, and Heywood translates Seneca's use of *sinus* (breast) as "succour", evoking connotations with "suckle" and emphasising the cruel circumstance of a mother unable to soothe her child, with the metaphor of breastfeeding. Astyanax is infantilised in Heywood's version, portrayed as a baby, both in the womb and at the breast. I would suggest that this is part of a larger pattern, emphasising the theme of maternity in the classical myths for an early

modern audience. Earlier in the scene, Heywood's Andromacha begs Hector to "deep in thy bosom hide my son that he may not be found" a translation of *sinu profundo conde depositum meum* (hide the treasure entrusted to you) (Heywood "Troas" III. i. 14; Fitch "Trojan Women" 218-9). Again, we see the Latin word *sinus* used. The Oxford Latin Dictionary defines *sinus* as a "curve; fold; hollow; bosom […] inmost part; hiding place; embrace" ("Sinus"). Heywood translates this first use of *sinus* as "bosom", evoking maternal images of both the womb and the mother's breast, and Hector is entreated to embrace the child in parental protection within the tomb. The second translation of *sinus* is seemingly omitted and replaced with "I cannot succour thee". I would argue that the translation of *sinus* as "bosom", one with which Heywood evidently concurred based on other lines in the play, is portrayed in the association of the nursing mother in Heywood's use of the word "succour". It is significant that the Latin translation of *sinus* can also mean the "curve" or "hollow" of the earth, or in this case a tomb, itself a metaphor for maternal gestation. The overlap of references to the female reproductive system and the natural/unnatural imagery is interesting here; notions of the womb, the breast, the earth, ashes, burial and encasement all interact in this scene and foreground Heywood's later preoccupations in *Thyestes*.

Another related addition in *Thyestes,* is the word "babes" when referring to Thyestes' children. In the line "As for myself, I nothing dread; you little babes make me afraid of him", the Latin reads *pro me nihil iam metuo: vos facitis mihi Atrea timendum,* (for myself I fear nothing now, you are the ones that make Atreus fearful to me) (III. i. 83-4; Fitch "Thyeses" 272). The reference to Thyestes' sons as "little babes" is entirely of Heywood's creation. It is possible that this is an attempt to infantilise them and to encourage the audience's sympathies, but this would hardly seem necessary given the circumstances of the plot. I would suggest that the primary effect of this addition is to reinforce the quasi-maternal role of Thyestes. We see a similar pattern just before Atreus reveals the nature of his revenge:

> THYESTES: Enough with meat and eke with wine, now satisfied am I.
> But yet of all my joys it were a great increase to me,
> If now about my side I might my little children see.
>
> ATREUS: Believe that here, even in thine arms, thy children present be.

> For here they are, and shall be here, no part of them fro thee
> Shall be withheld. Their loved looks, now give to thee I will,
> And with the heap of all his babes, the father fully fill (V. iii. 4-10).

Heywood foregrounds the word “increase” by reordering the words of the translation. The Latin *augere […] voluptatem potest* would generally translated into English as “increase my pleasure” (Fitch "Thyeses" 310-1). However, Heywood makes this “of all my joys it were a great increase to me”. I would suggest that the foregrounding of “increase” relates to its association with pregnancy in the early modern period. The Middle English Dictionary defines “increase” or “encres” in several ways including “growth”, “reproduction” and “propagation” ("Encres"). Combined with Atreus’ words “with the heap of all his babes, the father fully fill”, Heywood begins to paint a clear picture of Thyestes being pregnant with his sons. The phraseology “the heap of all his babes” and the reference to Thyestes’ sons as “little children” have no corresponding entry in the original, but these translations allow Heywood to augment the metaphor of mother and babes, offspring and source. We see a similar effect in the final act when Thyestes is described as having “growing guts” (V. iv. 34). The description relates to Thyestes having overeaten at the banquet, but simultaneously invokes the image of pregnancy. Boyle observes the ongoing dynamic between satiability and insatiability in the play that “index[es] man as beast” and this presents an interesting parallel with Thyestes’ betrayal of Atreus (Boyle 44). Thyestes is presented as insatiable, gluttonous and slovenly; so insatiable that he engaged in extramarital sex with his brother’s wife; so greedy that he ate his brother’s banquet without question and is now heavy “with child”.

Once Thyestes understands the true horror of the feast he has consumed, he appeals to figuratively give birth to his sons again:

> Thy sword, O brother, lend to me. Much of my blood, alas,
> It hath. Let us therewith make way for all my sons to pass.
> Is yet the sword fro me withheld? Thyself thy bosoms tear.
> And let thy breast resound with strokes (V. iii. 75-6).

Atreus is portrayed as the aggressor, holding the sword stained with much of Thyestes’ blood, and Thyestes is presented in the passive, pleading to perform a perverse fusion of self-sacrifice and a caesarean section. Again, we return to the theme of the beginnings and ends to life, to birth and death. The blood on Atreus’ sword represents the violence

committed against Thyestes' sons and symbolises their brutal deaths; yet this same image simultaneously represents the familial ties of kindred blood and the maternal blood of birth and life. Thyestes' fear and subsequent grief for his lost children is also depicted as feminine and maternal. Thyestes is presented as the cautious parent upon considering Atreus' reconciliation ("you little babes make me afraid of him") and grieving mother at the revelation of Atreus' revenge ("Alas, I wretch, what wailing my I give?") (III. i. 84; V. iii. 68). We see how Thyestes is continuously conflated with the feminine, and, as I discuss in the following section, with Catholic practice, in the depiction of beginnings and ends to life in the play.

Partly due to a strong belief in purgatory (an intercessory stage between life and death, during which prayers were given to deliver good souls to heaven), Catholic practice involved an elaborate set of mourning stages which the Reformers sought to curtail. In *Female Mourning in Medieval and Renaissance Drama*, Katherine Goodland confirms that Reformers considered Catholic mourning for the dead to be a heathen practice, and the depth of sorrow exhibited by mourners an indicator of self-indulgence and inconstant faith: "The tears that had once spoken eloquently to communities, to God and to the dead, were now coded as slavishly feminine, hypocritical and wasteful" (Goodland 203; 101). The notion of "wailing" for the dead would likely have been associated with Catholic lamentation ritual and tears of the Virgin Mary at Christ's crucifixion (the Pieta was a prominent Catholic image in the period). In the Reformers' rejection of purgatory, "there was no point in weeping for the dead because one's tears can no longer help them" (Goodland 101). The new church encouraged moderated grief for the death of a loved one, for the mourner was expected to demonstrate their unwavering belief that that person had ascended to heaven and there was nothing left on earth that could be done for them.

There are several uses of the word "wail" or "bewail" when describing mourning in *Thyestes.* Heywood translates the Latin *nondum stuprator liberos deflet suos*? (does the adulterer not yet weep for his own children?) as "Doth yet Thyestes not bewail his children's fatal day?" (Fitch "Thyeses" 234-5; I. i. 58). The OED defines "bewail" as to "lament loudly" or to "mourn" and this would likely have had resonances with Reformist "distrust of lamentation" in Catholic practice and their "general reaction against the ritual"

("Bewail, V."; Goodland 110). Heywood uses the word again when Thyestes describes his feeling of unease after having eaten the banquet as “with another voice than mine bewails my doleful breast” (V. iii. 32). This is translated from *meumque gemitu non meo pectus gemit* (my breast groans with groaning not my own) (Fitch "Thyeses" 313). Heywood translates both “weep” and “groan” in terms associated with lamentation, terms that likely echoed the ongoing debates between the old and new faith for a contemporary reader. Goodland shows how excessive mourning in post-Reformation England was associated with femininity, idolatry and paganism: “In late-sixteenth-century England these sinful tears are inextricably associated with women, and especially with the Virgin Mary, the embodiment of Catholic piety” (Goodland 103). In this sense Thyestes’ words “From face that would not weep, the streams do fall, / And howling cries amid my words arise; / My sorrow yet th’accustomed tears doth love, / And wretches still delight to weep and cry” align him with the female, and specifically with the Catholic feminine, a concept I will discuss in more detail in the following section (V. ii. 31-4).

“Swerving state of all unstable things”: natural succession and the Catholic feminine

While the presence of succession anxieties woven into Heywood’s classical verse are evident, a question might be raised as to whether the politically pertinent and publicly contentious tropes of Heywood’s adaptations were contextually inevitable or intended to convey a message. Heywood’s use of the term “swerving state” has evident associations with the succession debate but also with the interrelated religious upheaval of the sixteenth-century. While I would not argue that Heywood’s approach to his translation of *Thyestes* is overtly Catholic, it would be prudent to acknowledge that Heywood’s Catholic family background and associates, all of whom “shared a strong commitment to the old faith”, would unavoidably have influenced Heywood’s perspective on the succession debate (Ward 86). His father, John Heywood, had a reputation for writing politically and religiously contentious literature at the court of Henry VIII and in this regard, comparisons could certainly be drawn with his son.[13] The Catholic parallels in Heywood’s translations

[13] Greg Walker notes John Heywood’s “close association” with Princess Mary and the likelihood that he dedicated a poem to her in 1534, when she was firmly out of favour with the King and any “overt support for the Princess would have been seen as a tacit statement of opposition” (Walker *Plays of Persuasion* 155).

are subtle, and this is to be expected, for writing material with explicit Catholic sympathies would have been extremely dangerous at this time, and using literary translation as propaganda would no doubt have been beneath Heywood's lofty aspirations as a scholar seeking to renew "Senec's name" in "meter of [his] mother tongue" (*Thy.* Pref. 32; 54). What is clear, however, is that Heywood is writing as an English gentleman with connections to the court, and in particular as a Catholic subject of a Protestant queen, a member of "an alternative community" increasingly interpreted as "a recusant nucleus" (Shell 107). As we have discussed, Heywood's adaptations of *Thyestes* emphasise the importance of future generations, of legitimate heirs in "natural continuity", but they also warn against repeating the mistakes of the past.

Heywood's translations were published during the first few years of Elizabeth's reign, when religious reforms were truly beginning to be felt in Catholic households. Catholics of Heywood's generation had witnessed Henry VIII's split with Rome and felt the unease of a religious reform that became more extreme as it progressed. Historians such as Ethan Shagan and Peter Marshall assert that during the Henrican reign, large numbers of English people "straddled the confessional fence" in a combination of Roman and Anglican traditions that could be described as "Catholicism without the Pope" (Shagan 14; Marshall "Henry Viii and the Semantics of Schism" 22). However, the increasingly radical and Lutheran Protestant changes that had emerged during Edward's brief reign, and were equally fervently reversed by the Marian regime, threatened to resurface under Elizabeth.

The cyclical nature of Seneca's play will have resonated with Heywood's experience of mid sixteenth-century England. One of the parallels observed by Allyna Ward is that, like Seneca, Heywood had lived through the tumultuous reigns of five rulers by the time he completed his translations (Ward 80). He had experienced the instability of change instigated by Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, Elizabeth I and the brief coronation of Lady Jane Grey, as Seneca had throughout the regimes of Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and to some extent, Nero. It is possible that the foregrounding of maternity, birth and inheritance in *Thyestes* not only betrays an inescapable contemporary anxiety, but also an attempt to highlight the problems caused by a lack of heirs; an obstacle that had resulted in the instability of government and religion and exacerbated intolerance. In his approach to the translation of *Thyestes*, Heywood

highlights the ultimate horror of genealogy reversed, of the absence of heirs and the absence of future in a cyclical pattern of revenge. The Marian regime had, in effect, taken revenge on the changes imposed by the Edwardian administration and the possibility of the Elizabethan court repeating this pattern was a very real threat.

The repetition of revenge is a tragic convention, but it also signposts a strange temporality in the plot of *Thyestes* that is repeated in various symbols and metaphors; like Tantalus' punishment to be devoured and regenerated to be devoured again, it encapsulates the cyclical nature of time in the play. *Thyestes* symbolically subverts the unities and events take place only to be reversed; crimes are committed only to be repeated, and revenge is enacted only to call for further revenge. Alessandro Schiesaro points out that this propensity for repetition, combined with the regressive genealogy encapsulated in Thyestes' *kindermord* and that of his father and grandfather before him, reveals the tragedy of time "bent backwards":

> Prevented from moving forward, Thyestes is condemned to oscillate between returning to and returning from. The future, if we can now call it that, promises only the repetition of a well-known pattern: as Thyestes consummates his revenge, he will merely repeat once more the fixed script which holds his whole family hostage (Schiesaro 189-90).

While most Senecan tragedies include elements of cyclical revenge (Agamemnon is subsequently made the victim of Aegisthus for his father, Atreus' crimes),[14] the plot of *Thyestes* is notable in its elimination of descendants and consequently, in its inability to look forward into the future, and this is one of the elements this thesis will consider in relation to the emergent subgenre of revenge tragedy. The concluding scene added to the tragedy by Heywood, is remarkable in its failure to adhere to classical convention and foreshadow future events. The conclusion of the plot is "bent-backwards" and Thyestes is isolated and abandoned. The protagonist's calls for punishment go unanswered and the call for revenge is lacking, with only a brief allusion to the "wicked wight", which could apply to himself or Atreus, in the final line (Schiesaro 189; V. iv. 62). I would argue that the cycles of repetition that hold the house of Tantalus hostage have parallels in those that had affected the Tudor dynasty over the preceding thirty years. As we have

[14] Agamemnon's son, Orestes' subsequent revenge on Aegisthus is the subject of the contemporary interlude *Horestes* (1567) by John Pickering.

discussed, the very public case of infertility in the Tudor line of succession resulted in the upheaval of the religious Reformation, and repetition in the state religion's various guises under Henry, Edward, Mary and Elizabeth. Mary Tudor had hoped that an heir of her body would restore Catholicism in England, and only gave up on this hope days before her death, when she begrudgingly acknowledged Elizabeth as heir on 6th November 1558 (Weikel). At the time of Heywood's writing, Catholicism was facing elimination in England, while a Protestant female ruler, presently unmarried and without issue, sat on the throne. It is unlikely that Heywood's tale of doubtful succession and sibling hostilities over the rightful heir to a kingdom would have gone unnoticed by a contemporary reader.

However, the intent of such contemporary allusions remains ambiguous. Heywood ostensibly uses his translations to appeal to Elizabeth and her court (he dedicates *Troas* to the newly coronated queen) and yet there also seems to be some veiled warnings and anxieties present in the texts. It has been argued that Protestant poets and playwrights frequently conflated classical traditions with Catholic ones in order to distance them and categorise them definitively as part of the past,[15] but interestingly, in *Thyestes* we have a Catholic writer appearing to do the same. Perhaps for Heywood, *Thyestes'* tale of warring siblings, cruel revenge, and a kingdom that "takes not twain" served as a note of caution for his co-religionists (III. i. 43). Thyestes goes against his instincts and trusts in his brother's forgiveness of past wrongs and is viciously punished for doing so. In this sense, Heywood's text demonstrates the lasting undercurrent of old grudges and warns against trusting old enemies. The hyper-feminine image of Thyestes as "four wombs enwrapped in one", begging his brother to end his life and "make way for [his] sons to pass" might represent the oppression of the Catholic feminine in mid-sixteenth century England,[16] and the stunting of the Catholic line; in this sense, the image could serve as a warning of the potential dangers should Catholics put their faith in Elizabeth's *via media* (V. iv. 34). In the fifth act, immediately before the murders are revealed, Heywood begins a new verse with the lines "It is the wont of wight in woeful case, / In state of joy to have no confidence" (V. ii. 19-20). This is translated from the Latin *proporium hoc miseros sequitur vitium / numquam rebus credere laetis* (Yet the

[15] This is particularly true with Catholic plays containing ritualistic sacrifice, see Jennifer Waldron *Reformations of the body: idolatry, sacrifice and the early modern theater* (2013).
[16] By "Catholic feminine", I refer to the feminisation of the Catholic faith in sixteenth-century Protestant propaganda, an issue I will return to later in the section.

wretched are dogged by this special fault / of never trusting happy times) (Fitch "Thyeses" 309). Ignorant of the horrors to come, Thyestes chastises himself for not trusting his brother's intentions, but the narrative highlights the gravity of Thyestes' mistake in overriding his "misdoubts" and his naivety in overturning hostilities that "well were placed" (III. i.16; 33). Again, we return to ideas of continuity and isolation, a divided monarchy, a divided religion, and so a divided nation, struggling to move forward into a more holistic future. Heywood's text articulates concerns and doubts over the likelihood of satisfactory resolution via Atreus and Thyestes' mistrust of one another.

The argument that Heywood's additions and adaptations in *Thyestes* can be interpreted as advice for the newly crowned Elizabeth is one that has been posited by several critics.[17] While I agree that this is a likely hypothesis, I would propose that the lesson to be learned is not only concerned with the perils of tyrannical rulers, but also with the importance of heirs in enabling a kingdom to break cycles of destructive repetition. Heywood's sincerity in his devotion to Queen Elizabeth's "imperial crown" in the dedication to his first translation in 1559 has often been questioned, particularly when taking into consideration his decision to flee into exile in 1561 after refusing to comply with Elizabethan reforms (*Tro*. Dedication 24; Flynn *John Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility* 42). Significantly, Heywood ends the dedication of *Troas* with a "prayer to God to send us long the fruition of so excellent and gracious a lady" (*Tro*. Dedication 38-9). The word "fruition" is glossed in Winston and Kerr's edition as "enjoyment; pleasure arising from possession" but one cannot help but infer a secondary meaning of "fertility" (Ker and Winston *Elizabethan Seneca* 70). The word "fruit" had associations of fertility in the early modern period, as it does today, and the OED lists several instances of sixteenth-century texts that use the word in this way ("Fruit, N."). In this sense, Heywood is appealing for the course of natural inheritance to once again bring political and religious constancy to England. Whether Heywood and his co-religionists truly believed the child-saviour of England to be the heir of Elizabeth's body is difficult to determine. Mary Tudor would have been the only child of Henry VIII recognised by the Catholic Church; both Edward and Elizabeth were children of subsequent marriages and illegitimate according to Papal law,

[17] See James Ker and Jessica Winston *Elizabethan Seneca: Three Tragedies* (2012), Linda Woodbridge *Resistance Theory Meets Drama: Tudor Seneca* (2010), Frank Lucas *Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy* (2009) and Allyna Ward *Women and Tudor Tragedy: Feminizing Counsel and Representing Gender* (2013).

and consequently it is likely that Catholics would have viewed Mary Stuart as the rightful heir to the throne. As Alison Shell points out, "no monarch focused Catholic hope more effectively than Mary Stuart" and at the time of Heywood's writing Mary had recently married and was expected to give birth to an heir (Shell 117).[18] Shell suggests that while most followers of the old faith in the period viewed Mary as the rightful heir to the English throne, they knew all too well the importance of not articulating this in public (Shell 117).

Yet, as we have discussed, while "natural inheritance", and an heir of the body were considered the divinely-sanctioned route to political stability, they contrasted with the ambivalent contemporary attitudes towards pregnancy, birth, and the female body. A biological perception of women as inherently flawed was compounded by their portrayal in humoral theory as vulnerable and permeable and by the use of the female reproductive body as a vehicle for the punishment of original sin in religious allegory. Such associations resulted in increasingly ambivalent attitudes towards pregnancy and birth towards the end of the sixteenth century. Women's bodies were increasingly viewed as unpredictable, untrustworthy, and deceptive; and these sentiments became associated not only with the biology of the female, but also with the social and cultural understanding of the feminine.

As a result of this, there was an emergent concern that inheritance may not only represent the transference of power and virtue accrued by the father, but also the transference of sin and immorality passed through the mother. As Kathryn Moncrief and Kathryn McPherson point out, with such debate surrounding the medical requirements for birth, and the cultural significance of pregnancy, the maternal body came to function as "as a potent space for cultural conflict, a site of imagination and contest" (Kathryn M Moncrief and Kathryn R McPherson 1). These contentions had obvious implications for a newly coronated female monarch without children. In the early years of Elizabeth's reign, maternal imagery and rhetoric of the "natural" was used to separate her from her childless predecessor, Mary. However, as time went on, with an increased sense of urgency surrounding the issue, there was a general consensus at court that to be a "good political and symbolic mother" of the nation, Elizabeth must become a mother "literally and biologically" (Richards and Thorne 151; 53). Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne

[18] In fact, Mary's husband Francois II, died in December 1560 and Mary was remarried to Lord Darnley in 1565, before the birth of her son James in 1566.

discuss the changes in maternal imagery surrounding Elizabeth in this period in *Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England:*

> [T]hrough the 1560s tension increased between the wishes of Elizabeth's subjects for her to become a mother physically and her apparent resistance to doing so. Each side used maternal imagery as a form of deliberative rhetoric, each attempting to drive policy in an opposite direction. Maternal imagery rapidly ceased to be a soothing, pacifying device […] (Richards and Thorne 153).

Richards and Thorne observe that much of this maternal/political rhetoric was based on Isaiah 49:23, in which Kings are described "nursing fathers" and queens as "nursing mothers" (Richards and Thorne 150; Hendrickson 352). As in *Thyestes*, we see the physicality of the maternal body being employed as an emblem of the natural, in both male and female symbology of the monarch, and, as with Atreus and Thyestes, we see the connotations of this imagery change from comforting to threatening, as the circumstances of the plot develop.

Yet regardless of whether Elizabeth or Mary held the potential for the "natural continuity" of England, I think it is clear that Heywood's translation of, and prefatory material to, *Thyestes* foregrounds the redeeming qualities of progeny while warning against the dangers of repeating the mistakes of the past. *Thyestes* reflects this understanding of the politically redemptive power of children and when Atreus reveals to Thyestes the heads of his murdered sons in the final act, Thyestes replies with:

> […] Such a guilt yet can'st thou suffer well,
> O earth, to bear? Not yet from hence to Stygian Lake of hell
> Dost thou both drown thyself and us? Nor yet with broken ground
> Dost thou these kingdoms and their king with Chaos rude confound?
> Nor yet uprenting from the soil the bowers of wicked land
> Dost thou Mycenas overturn?" (V. iii. 40-2).

From this response, we see how children are symbolic of civil stability in the play. Thyestes has not yet discovered the full extent of Atreus' revenge in repeating the cannibalism of his forefathers, but in the eradication of Thyestes' royal children, Atreus has "confounded" heaven and earth and brought "chaos" upon the kingdom. The tragic context of this play dictates that Thyestes' immediate response to the murder of his children should be overwhelming grief, but the political significance of that grief is

foregrounded in this scene, and it is made clear that Atreus has overturned the future of Mycenae in his destruction of royal heirs.

While the political implications of lost heirs are implicit in *Thyestes*, it is the physicality of birth, death, and consumption that is consistently pushed into the foreground. Beginnings and ends to life in *Thyestes* are saturated with tropes of femininity and female physicality (a concept captured most succinctly in Heywood's use of the womb/tomb fusion, but one which has a much broader influence within the text). These metaphors were not uncommon in the period, and this was likely related to the accentuated role of the female in sixteenth-century birthing and death rituals, as evidenced in contemporary conduct books and advice manuals. Extended religious rituals of the birthing process and "laying in" period were not only female-centred but often an exclusively female environment; and mourning practices, prayers, and the preparation of the body for burial were all conventionally female-led (Muir 54). As Ruben Espinosa asserts: "one's origin and end, then, were bound to the feminine, and this relationship with the maternal seems to posit the paternal figure outside the scope of these defining moments" (Espinosa 127). Thyestes' portrayal throughout the text is bound up with the feminine, and his position as the beginning and end of his own familial line is compounded by this imagery. Where the feminine in birth and death rituals had once been considered blessed and divinely-inspired, such practices became increasingly contentious in the mid sixteenth-century, as the Reformist disdain for acts of ritual became more acute, and we see elements of this division and ambiguity in the portrayal of Thyestes. The monstrous images of pregnancy in the text reflect some of the antagonistic attitudes towards the Catholic reverence of birth and pregnancy, attitudes which were inextricably linked to the female emblem of Catholicism, the Virgin Mary.

After the Reformation, almost all ritual practice was inextricably linked with Catholicism, and those practices featuring the Virgin Mary or "Our Lady of Sorrows" were singled out for particular derision and regarded as indulgent, sinful and idolatrous. The Virgin came to represent a "feminized" understanding of Catholicism for Reformers and was particularly associated with excessive and elaborate ritual practice. Frances E. Dolan points out the range of ways in which Catholicism was associated with the feminine:

> Catholicism was associated with actual women […] and with men who were viewed as effeminized by their celibacy or exclusion from public life. The religion was also associated with the Virgin Mary and a large cast of female saints and martyrs who dominated stories and visual representations (Dolan 216).

Those people or practices that embodied the feminine in public life were frequently treated with suspicion, as possible recusant Catholics, or at the very least, as exhibiting behaviours with troubling Catholic affinities. It was not only the Virgin, but by association all women, and particularly pregnant women, that the Reformers felt the Catholic church made into "objects of idolatrous adoration" (Janes and Waller 114). Dolan goes on to explain how "like the feminine, Catholicism was associated with horror and longing, with rot and ornament, with anger and compassion. It was therefore more beautiful and desirable, least troublesome and ambiguous, if absolutely dead" (Dolan 216). This description of "rot and ornament" can be detected in *Thyestes*, where maternal images that would usually be associated with virtue and beauty are turned on their head, coming to instil a type of uncanny horror in the onlooker. We see this overlap of the familiar and the frightening in Thyestes' reticent return to his family home ("I am returned: my mind misdoubts and backwards seeks to bear / My body hence […]") and in Thyestes' desire to keep his children close ("now about my side I might my little children see" "[…] now restore to me my children all" (Freud "The "Uncanny"" 930; III. i. 16-17; V. iii. 6; 28). I would suggest that this sense of unease created by Heywood after the unsuspecting Thyestes has consumed the gruesome banquet, is intensified by his use of pregnancy tropes, and all the uncertain and contentious connotations of this topic in mid sixteenth-century England. This overarching motif surrounding the internal virus linked the classical inherited curse with recusant Catholicism, and with changing notions of pregnancy in the period.

However, Heywood's verse was not unique in accentuating these contemporary concerns about the nature of pregnancy and inheritance. We see similar anxieties woven into Alexander Neville's 1563 translation of *Oedipus*, where the use of the word "womb", with its intertwined connotations of the divine and the damned, compounds the unnatural nature and perverse physicality of Oedipus' crime.

> […] A wretched child that sits in Father's Seate:
> And Mother's bed defyles (O wretch) and entreth in agayne,

In places whence he came from once and doubleth so her payne,
Whilst that hee fils the haples wombe wherin himselfe did lie
With graceless seede and causeth her twise childbirths pangues to try:
Unhappy Sonne, but Father worse and most unhappy hee,
By whom the lawes of sacred shame are sore confounded bee.
For that that very bestes (almost) do all abhorre to do,
Even of his mothers body he hath brothers gotten two (*Oed*. III. i).

Sex rex cruentus pretia qui saeve necis
Sceptra et nefandos occupant thalamus patris,
[invisa proles: sed tamen peior parens
Quam natus, utero rursus infausto gravis][19]
Egitque in ortus semet et matri impios
Fetus regessit, quique vix mos est feris,
Fratraes sibi ipse genuit […] (Seneca "Oedipus" 70-2).

Neville expands the passage with intricate descriptions of the physicality of Oedipus' crimes and there is a distinct sense of perverting the natural and distorting the divine. For both Seneca and Neville, Oedipus has corrupted the "laws of sacred shame", but in Neville's translation there is an accentuated sense of perverting natural inheritance, distorting natural time, and subverting the natural course of events, by "entering in agayne in places whence he came from once". Neville adds the imagery of Jocasta in childbirth "with graceless seede and causeth her twise childbirth pangues to try". The Latin reads *Egitque in ortus semet et matri impios* (He has pushed to his very source, forced unnatural procreation back on his mother) and *Fratraes sibi ipse genuit* (sired brothers for himself), but Neville portrays the physicality of Jocasta figuratively giving birth to Oedipus twice and emphasises the birth of his sons/brothers "even of his mothers body" (Fitch "Oedipus" 70-3). Oedipus has turned inheritance back on itself in returning to his origins, filling "the haples wombe wherin himselfe did lie". Neville emphasises this physical perversion of the natural course of time in repeated imagery of returning to the mother's womb and describes Oedipus' overwhelming guilt and desire to endure "all torments under the sun that may his Cares conceivde encrease" as punishment for his crimes (*Oed*. V. i). The majority of the descriptions of Oedipus' guilt in the opening speech of Act 5 are additional to the Latin and the phrasing of "cares conceivede encrease" is

[19] Fitch notes that these two lines are removed in the standard edition used by modern critics, Otto Zwierlein's 1986 translation. I have included the lines, for as we see from Neville's translation, they would have almost certainly been included in the early modern Latin edition used by the translators.

interesting because we again return to the language of conception and pregnancy in the translators' embellishments to Seneca's work. The depiction of maternity as "a powerful symbol of natural process" was common in the period, and the metaphor as a representation of order and linearity that is perverted and corrupted by Oedipus' incest and Thyestes' cannibalism, was examined and, to some degree, challenged by both Neville and Heywood (McLaren 751).

As we have discussed, tensions surrounding inheritance, pregnancy, and birth in the mid sixteenth century were manifold; political, religious, social, and scientific changes all had significant influence on public perceptions. As Reformist ideology sought to moderate Mary's role within the church, Mary's association with maternity, and consequently maternity's association with the divine, were beginning to be eroded by a new doctrine that taught women to identify pregnancy with the sins of Eve, rather than the blessings of the Virgin (Fissell 43). The suggestion that expectant mothers should associate their labour pains with the Fall and the sins of Eve drastically altered the religious connotations of pregnancy and aligned the female body not with the miraculous conception but with the fallible flesh. This renewed focus on the consequences of The Fall in sixteenth-century England bore striking resemblances to the classical understanding of the inherited curse. In *The End of Satisfaction,* Heather Hirschfield notes the significance of this association for tragedy in the period:

> Among its many consequences, this doctrine calls special attention to the transgenerationally infectious consequences of the Fall, emphasizing both the permanent, deadly nature of parental fault and the sexuality that is both its punishment and its source. These emphases rely upon and reinforce a vocabulary of legacy, of the transmission and propagation of initial concupiscence from the first parents to the rest of mankind (Hirschfield 73).

We can see some of these emergent ideas about pregnancy and The Fall in the depiction of Thyestes' "monstrous womb", which comes to represent an insidious and threatening symbol of the destruction of futurity (V. iv. 19). Thyestes literally consumes his own future, and in so doing, condemns himself to an endless cycle of punitive repetition. The final scene depicts Thyestes pursuing the "fleeing" Gods for justice and "due deserts"; alone on stage, he is isolated from the surrounding action, with life left on earth and no "gates of hell" to engulf him, he begs to "overtake" his endless cycle, to see justice done:

> Yet slowly flee, that I, at length, may you yet overtake,
> While wandering ways I after you and speedy journey make.
> […] Ye scape not fro me so ye gods; still after you I go,
> And vengeance ask on wicked wight your thunderbolt to throw (V. iv. 57-8; 61-2).

We see that Thyestes is suspended in his torment, and the trope of pregnancy has been appropriated from a symbol of life-giving, divinely-inspired beginnings, to one of pain, suffering, death and cessation.

There are some interesting parallels to be drawn between Heywood's imagery of this diabolical pregnancy and descriptions of recusant Catholicism in the period. Recusant Catholicism was frequently described not only as a "corrupting feminine force", but also as an "insidious internal virus" in England (Janes and Waller 114; Marshall "Lollardy and Catholicism" 28). This imagery of illegitimate pregnancy, of a dangerous interloper, grew in popularity as the period progressed.[20] As Mary Fissell observes:

> In the early seventeenth century, ideas about the womb began to change. Its wonderful powers sometimes became terrible ones threatening the life of the mother or breeding monsters rather than babies (Fissell 3).

We see these anxieties foreshadowed in the translation of *Thyestes*, not only in the connections between greed and sexual appetite, but in reverting and perverting the natural order of inheritance, either by returning descendants to their origins, or replacing them with malignant interlopers. Atreus' dual fears are that the seed of his brother shall prosper, and that his children are not his own. His fear of being disinherited by the sons of Thyestes is compounded by his suspicions that his children are changelings, with greater loyalty to his brother. In *Gorboduc*, when Videna denounces her younger son, Porrex, a "changeling" to her womb she calls him a "traitor":

> VIDENA Shall I still think that from this womb thou sprung?
> That I thee bare? Or take thee for my son?
> No, traitor, no; I thee refuse for mine!
> Murderer, I thee renounce; thou art not mine.
> Never, O wretch, this womb conceived thee,
> Changeling to me thou art, and not my child (IV. i. 63-68).

[20] Most obviously depicted in Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling,* and explored briefly in William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus,* which I return to later.

It is relatively unusual, for a mother to be identifying her child as a changeling (though I discuss similar themes later with The Duchess in *Richard III),* for of course, her biological ties to the child were much stronger than the father's; a troubling fact that was explored in much of the drama of the period. However, we see further links to the "internal virus" and diabolical pregnancy trope in Videna's words, her womb bred a "monster" and her child is depicted as a traitor and a usurper. The concluding section will explore the ways in which Atreus expresses similar concerns about his "uncertain seed" and their capacity for betrayal (II. i 154-7).

Atreus as impotent father

Atreus could be considered to fulfil the paternal role of *Thyestes*: he is, at once, King and avenger, ruler and "father" of Mycenae and the crime for which Atreus seeks retribution was a crime against this role. Thyestes threatened Atreus' position as husband, father and king in his adultery with Aerope; he brought the paternity of his children into question and conspired with Aerope to deceive Atreus into surrendering the kingdom. In the final scene, Atreus tells his brother that this terrible crime was enacted upon his nephews because Thyestes' children were his "certain sons" (V. iii. 135). This paternal assurance has been taken from Atreus after Thyestes' adultery with Aerope, and Atreus' crime demonstrates the severity of the need to determine biological progeny. Atreus seeks to forcibly restore his position of masculine power, of authority and virility, but we see this role subverted in several Choral odes:

> A King is he that fear hath laid aside,
> And all affects that in the breast are bred;
> Whom impotent ambition doth not guide
> Nor fickle favour hath of people led […] (II. Cho. 13-6).

Here Heywood translates *impotens* literally as "impotent", rather than the more typical "powerless" ("Impotens"; "Impotent, Adj. And N."). The word "impotent" likely meant both "without power" and "incapable of reproduction" to an early modern audience and this overlap would have helped reinforce the perception of Atreus as both weak and ineffectual ("Impotent, Adj. And N."). This is supported by the later description of Atreus by the Chorus:

> Would any man it ween? That cruel wight,

> Atreus, of mind so impotent to see,
> Was soon astonied with his brother's sight
> No greater force than piety may be (III. Cho. 1-4).
>
> *Credat hoc quisquam? Ferrus ille et acer*
> *Nec portens mentis truculentus Atreus*
> *Fratris aspectu stupefactus haesit.*
> *Nulla vis maior pietate vera est* (Fitch 278).

The Latin describes Atreus as *acer* (violent) *nec potens* (not powerful) and *truculentus* (aggressive) of mind, and Heywood again centres on the word "impotent" in his translation of the Chorus' assessment ("Acer"; "Potens"; "Truculentus"). It is in his very desperation to maintain his position that Atreus loses it, aligning him with other depictions of the tyrant in the period, for as Littlewood observes: "through his […] lack of control, the tyrant betrays himself as effeminate and impotent in the very exercise of his power" (Littlewood 57).

Concerns surrounding legitimacy were prevalent in early modern England and Heywood's readership would be familiar with anxieties concerning biological legitimacy and the rhetoric of impotence surrounding the husband of an adulterous wife. In *Problem Fathers in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama*, Tom MacFaul argues that "newly competing theories of biology" in the Renaissance "made people genuinely concerned as to the kind of investment a father had in his children" and as Ariane Balizet observes: "Anxieties of cuckoldry loom over the households in Renaissance drama" distinguishing the cuckold from his neighbours as "inhuman and impotent" (MacFaul 12; Balizet 66). It is likely that Heywood accentuated this aspect of Atreus' distress in the knowledge that this would resonate with his audience. As we have discussed, the importance of securing the future of the crown with healthy, legitimate heirs to avoid the "doom of doubtful things" that plagues Atreus so mercilessly, was a major concern in the period, and one which was frequently played out on the stage (IV. i. 36). In *Thyestes*, Atreus associates the "doubt" surrounding his paternity with the vulnerability of the kingdom:

> No part of mine remaineth safe to me from trains of his.
> My fere deflowered and loyalty of empire broken is,
> My house all vexed, my blood in doubt, and nought that trust is in
> But brother foe (II. i. 63-6).

> *pars nulla nostri tuta ab insidiis vacat,*
> *corrupta coniunx imperi quassa est fides,*
> *domus aegra, dubius sanguis: est certi nihil*
> *nisi frater hostis* (Fitch 248).

Heywood brings to life Atreus' anxiety in early modern terms. He translates *insidiis* ("plots" or "traps") as "trains", for which the OED lists sixteenth-century uses relating to "strategem" or "deceit", but which also, according to the Middle English Dictionary Online, will have had figurative meanings relating to "ancestry" and "lineage" ("Insidiis"; "Train, N.1"; "Train(E) N.2"). This reveals another double translation of Heywood's, relating to Atreus' fear that the supposed progeny of his brother has tainted every part of him. Atreus describes feeling displaced by his brother, surpassed by his double in his rightful role in the patriarchy of the family unit and in the hierarchy of the kingdom.[21] Atreus describes Aerope's adultery as "my fere deflowered", which is interesting when we consider that "fere" meant wife and "deflowered" probably meant "deprived of virginity" to an early modern reader ("Deflowered, Adj."). Aerope, as a wife and mother of two children, cannot literally be a virgin but Atreus' words elevate Aerope in comparison with the Virgin, and imply both Atreus' impotence and Thyestes' usurping of his position in the marriage bed. From Atreus' speech we understand the extent of Thyestes' naivety in believing the kingdom can be of double rule, and the audience are assured that a kingdom cannot have two rulers as a child cannot have two fathers. This may have been a poignant concern to Heywood's readers, and particularly to his Catholic contemporaries, who at the time of publication, were effectively living with "two queens in one isle" as Elizabeth I and her cousin Mary Queen of Scots "each [had] comparable blood claims to the English throne" (McLaren 740) .

The rhetoric surrounding the nature of hierarchy, and particularly the image of the monarch as patriarch, and head of the body politic, was already well-trodden ground in the Elizabethan period, and would be similarly well-used in the decades to come (Attie 497). As we have discussed, the threat of Atreus being displaced as patriarch (both literally and metaphorically) would have resonated with a contemporary audience who had experienced the discord of a disputed succession and were all too ready to imagine

[21] For more detail on the use of doubling in *Thyestes,* including double rule of Mycenae, twin suns and doubled language see Alessandro Schiesaro *The passions in play: Thyestes and the dynamics of Senecan drama* (2003).

the chaos of a world without the certainty and clarity of a hierarchical patriarchy. Megaera foregrounds this image of disorder in her instructions to Tantalus at the opening of the play:

> […] From bretheren proud let rule of kingdom flit
> To runagates. And swerving state of all unstable things,
> Let it by doubtful doom be tossed between th'uncertain kings (I. i. 32-4).

However, many have observed that Atreus' plot goes beyond the assurance of his position as King, which by this point in the narrative, he has already comfortably regained, and beyond retribution for the humiliation he has suffered as a result of the adultery. In the style of *maius nefas*, Atreus' cannibalistic infanticide surpasses Thyestes' transgressions by far. I would suggest that Atreus' concern that Thyestes' adultery with Aerope has perverted the legitimacy of his succession is significant here, and we see that the accentuated horror of the revenge is directly related to his desire for conviction in his sons' lineage. The act must be of upmost horror and revulsion, to ensure that only those with loyalties of blood will participate:

> […] Truth of th' uncertain seed,
> By such a practice may be tried. If it refuse they shall
> Nor of debate will bearers be, if they him uncle call,
> He is their father. Let them go (II. i 154-7).

The caesura used in "He is their father. Let them go" is almost menacing here, as Atreus stresses the monumental significance of their decision on this matter. In the absence of biological proof that they are his "certain sons", Atreus must test their loyalties to breaking point.

The terrible banquet, a trope that later became a "powerful and openly acknowledged model" in Renaissance tragedy, is the mode through which Atreus seeks to secure his legacy, but the dramatic irony for the audience lies in the knowledge that he is only repeating the past (Meads 23). Atreus' revenge marks a fusion between past and future; he believes his actions have assured his royal lineage for generations to come, but we are aware that they bear a striking resemblance to the crimes of his ancestors, and as such, represent a demonstration of the *maius nefas* instigated by Magaera in the prologue. As Dodson-Robinson observes: "distinctions between past exemplars and the

present moment become fluid" as a result of Atreus' crime (Dodson-Robinson 57). Atreus' displacement by Thyestes, at once his double and "brother foe", calls into question his future and problematises the "natural" and unilateral temporality of inheritance and succession. Atreus believes he has restored order to the kingdom and preserved the rightful future of the House of Tantalus, but the audience know that Atreus' deed represents a greater perversion of succession. The first line from Atreus, once he considers the revenge complete, demonstrates this "fluidity" of temporality. Atreus understands the deed not only to have secured his future, but to have retroactively repaired the past:

> Now praise I well my hands,
> Now got I have the palm; I had been overcome of thee,
> Except thou sorrow'st so. But now even children born to me
> I count, and now of bride-bed chaste the faith I do repair (V. iii. 85; 128-31).

The "palm", or victory, is won and Atreus believes he is able to move forward into a future that is his own, his paternity and marriage bed thus "repaired". It is interesting that Atreus considers the past re-written by his deeds. In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* Lee Edelman terms this desire to restore an "imaginary past" through progeny "reproductive futurism" (Edelman 21). The audience are aware that Atreus has no tangible reassurance that his children are his own, and seemingly none whatsoever that Aerope is now faithful to him. Atreus' dominance over his threatening brother-double has rectified those former displacements and given him mastery over the past. The line "I had been overcome of thee, / Except thou sorrow'st so (*perdideram scelus, nisi sic doleres)* is a strange translation from Heywood (Fitch 320). Fitch translates this line as "my crime would have been wasted if you did not feel pain like this" (Fitch 321). Heywood, seemingly unintentionally, almost inverts this meaning, but I think the word choice is significant. Atreus seeks to "overcome" Thyestes. The OED defines "overcome" as "defeat" or "overpower", but also to "pass over", to "surpass" to "go beyond" ("Overcome, V."). Atreus understands his own actions in relation to Thyestes' perceived duplicitous intent and believes his brother would have enacted the same revenge upon him given the opportunity: "Some mischief great there must be ventured now, / Both fierce and bloody, such as would my brother rather long / To have been his" (II. i. 18-20). In this sense,

Atreus has not only defeated Thyestes as an enemy, but also surpassed him as his definitive rival.

This pattern is repeated in the fraternal relationship at the centre of Norton and Sackville's *Gorboduc*. Like Atreus and Thyestes, Gorboduc's two sons are fundamentally representative of their position within the patriarchal system. Ferrex is the elder brother and the rightful heir to the kingdom, Porrex is the younger, ambitious usurper, but ultimately, they are indistinguishable, they are adversaries only by circumstance and fundamentally two sides of the same coin. One of the (many) advisors of the play remarks upon this fact:

> PHILANDER […] And such an egalness hath nature made
> Between the brethren of one father's seed
> As an unkindly wrong it seems to be
> To throw the brother subject under feet
> Of him whose peer he is by course of kind
> And nature that did make this egalness
> Oft so repineth at so great a wrong,
> That oft she raiseth by a grudging grief,
> In younger Brethren at the elder's state:
> Whereby both towns and kingdoms have been razed
> And famous stocks of Royal blood destroyed (I. ii. 181-91).

The "egalness" of Ferrex and Porrex is echoed by various characters throughout the play, and Gorboduc seeks to solidify their equality when dividing his kingdom between them, reassuring his advisors that "My love extendeth egally to both, My Land sufficeth for them both also" (I. ii. 343). While Arostus concurs with Gorboduc's plan, and Eubulus opposes it, Philander contemplates both sides; he acknowledges the injustice of nature but emphasises the importance of tradition and stability, predicting that the tension between the brothers will be exacerbated by the king's decision to flout expectations, and overstep the processes of time: "When time has taught them, time shall make them place, / The place that now is full" (334-5). Their similarity becomes a threat once they have been informed of the divided kingdom and each begins to suspect the other of deception. After the murder of his brother, Porrex tells Gorboduc of his (supposedly unfounded) suspicions: "Then I saw how he smiled with slaying knife /Wrapped under cloak; then I saw deep deceit / Lurk in his face and death prepared for me (IV. ii. 122-4). Here, we are reminded of Atreus' belief that Thyestes would have done the same to him had he not

seized his revenge: “Set first on him, lest while I rest, he should on me arise. / He will destroy or be destroyed” (*Th.* II. i. 202-3). The parallel positioning of both sets of brothers illustrates the volatility of a contested throne and foregrounds the importance of a (literal) line of inheritance, while deepening the audience’s appreciation of political stability (Cavanagh "Political Tragedy" 6). As with Atreus and Thyestes, the doubling of the two brothers emphasises the danger of an unpredictable counterpart, an uncertain succession and a divided kingdom. Eubulus articulates this sentiment to the king in perhaps the most explicit appeal to Elizabeth:

> Within one land one single rule is best:
> Divided reigns do make divided hearts (I. ii. 259-60).

It is this sense of perilous division that *Gorboduc* inherits from *Thyestes:* two brothers and two rulers, who, although of one blood, cannot live side by side. In this sense, the play promotes the legislative simplicity of autocracy, or perhaps views this as a necessity - though the play also contains a stark caveat about rulers who do not listen to counsel – for when Gorboduc overrules his advisors, he sparks a chain of events that results in revolt and violent death. By enacting *maius nefas,* Atreus has overtaken Thyestes both in degree and, quite literally, in time; Atreus has gained control of his past by exceeding it and believes that the natural course of temporality can be subverted, and the past amended, by violent deeds. However, ultimately it is the children, and not the violent acts, that are symbolic of debt and reparations in the play. It is not the murder or mutilation of Thyestes’ sons that repays the wrong; only once Atreus believes his sons are his own, and that his heritage and his lineage have been returned to him, does he consider the score settled.

As Joseph Campana observes in “The Child’s Two Bodies”, the symbolic role of children, and particularly royal children, as “emblems of triumphant succession—the future that will have been” in early modern drama was a prevalent motif (Campana 812). And it is this type of “triumphant succession” that Atreus aims to secure in his dreadful deeds, securing the future of his kingdom (and himself) in his own “certain sons”. However, we are reminded that it is not only triumph and glory that transcends the generations, but also crime, horror, and revenge. The play opens with the fury Megaera compelling the ghost of Tantalus to spread his “dire discord” around the house and revisit his sins on the descendants (I. i. 84). The fury dictates clear instructions to Tantalus:

Let fury blind enflame their minds and wrathful will.
Let yet the parents' rage endure a longer lasting ill
Through children's children spread […]
But ere the guilt with vengeance be acquit,
Increase the crime (I. i. 27-32).

Again, we have the proximity of "children's children", "parents" and "increase", foregrounding the importance of inheritance in this particular crime; the burden to be borne by the house of Tantalus is precisely that it shall forevermore be a burden to be *born* into the House of Tantalus. Their heritage and their past preclude their future and it is this that symbolises the "curse" upon the house. The "discord" spread around the "wicked house" could be interpreted as the desire for a greater revenge, and it is interesting to consider the form revenge takes in the play. By revisiting the past on the present, Tantalus inspires a revenge that repeats exactly this pattern. Atreus is not content with murdering Thyestes for his transgressions, or even with murdering Thyestes's sons and staying his lineage, for he does not consider these to be the appropriate severity, or more importantly, the appropriate type, of revenge required. Schiesaro notes that "Atreus' obsession with a *maius nefas* draws attention […] to the fact that any repetition of *nefas* is necessarily worse than its precedent" (Schiesaro 193). It is clear that Atreus' understanding of vengeance is an escalation of crime, else it is no revenge at all. This places the action inescapably in the domain of the past, forever "bent backwards" without the potential for conclusion. For while Atreus asserts that his future will be a prosperous one, with his marriage bed retroactively repaired and secure in the knowledge of his children's paternity, the audience know this cannot be. This is metaphorically depicted in the reversal of the sun's course, the "backward drawing day" warning of horrors to come (I. i. 120).

Equally, the type of revenge also appears crucial. The audience know that Atreus' plot to deceive his brother into consuming his offspring mirrors the actions of Tantalus in his attempt to feed his son Pelops to the gods, and therefore represents, not simply a monstrous act of vengeance against his brother, but also the repetition of the past foreshadowed in the first act. It is not clear whether Atreus acknowledges this element of the plan, or whether he is blindly fulfilling the instruction for "dire discord", but it is apparent that only this plan will suffice:

ATREUS: [..] Let greedy parents all his babes devour,

> And glad to rent his children be, and on their limbs to feed.
> Enough and well it is devised: this pleaseth me indeed (II. i. 102-104).

Again, here we see Heywood's use of the word "babes". By regressing the descriptions of Thyestes' children to "babes", Heywood foregrounds the trope of birth and descendants in contrast with consumption and regression. By consuming his children, Thyestes returns them to the womb in a perverse reversal of birth and life, and retroactively repairs the damage he caused in his infidelity with Aerope. It is this element of the punishment that satisfies, albeit temporarily, the desire for revenge that has penetrated the house. For Thyestes there is no future, as it has been consumed by the past. Thyestes' mistake is thinking that Atreus is willing to move into a shared future, when this is an impossibility; Atreus is both wittingly, and perhaps unwittingly, obsessed with the past and seeks to regain it.

2. "Stop their mouths": linguistic heritage and verbal violence in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus*

While inherited debt and the pursuit of justice, the legacy of violence, and the reverberations of action are all themes developed in the previous chapter; this chapter shall focus specifically on how speech interacts with these established motifs, and particularly, how speech is incorporated into notions of inheritance, exchange, and legacy in the revenge tradition. Rhetoric and bombast were elements adopted and adapted from the Senecan style throughout mid and late sixteenth-century drama, but while recognising declamatory oration as the lofty style of a "good" tragedy, the emerging genre of revenge tragedy also raises some interesting questions about the dangers of eloquence and persuasive speech. The plays I consider in this chapter are permeated with conflicted anxieties surrounding language; where concerns about the power of rhetoric and its ability to manipulate individuals and disrupt the social order, overlap with anxieties that correlate the loss of voice with the loss of agency, and fears about dying unheard. This chapter explores how dying unheard becomes a proxy for dying without heir in these texts. Being heard, or more specifically, being listened to, comes to represent potency for the protagonists; words that live on, via their offspring, or in the wider social and historical memory, become the only accessible, and most significant, form of inheritance.

I explore how these ideas of inheritance and language shape the genre in the later decades of the sixteenth century, looking specifically at Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1582-92) and William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (c. 1588-93),[22] as early examples of revenge tragedy in the commercial theatre and exploring how tragic themes develop alongside, and overlap with, the contemporary political environment.

[22] There is an ongoing debate as to whether *Titus Andronicus* is a collaborate work between Shakespeare and George Peele. There have been suggestions that the style and metric composition of various scenes (particularly in Act 1) indicates a co-author, and George Peele has been considered the most likely candidate due to his comprehensive classical education and stylistic parallels between *Titus Andronicus* and Peele's poetry (Vickers 166-69). The attribution of authorship is not significant for my inquiry, but a detailed analysis of the authorship debate can be found in Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays* (2004).

Concerns surrounding the succession were of course still prevalent in the later sixteenth century, particularly due to Elizabeth's advancing age and the threat from Mary Queen of Scots, and these anxieties can be traced in the recurring motifs of heirs as emblems of the future in both texts (Stacey 62; Bach 5). Alongside these considerations, I examine how inheritance and legacy are bound up with speech and rhetoric; from the destructive physical, legal, and social impact of speech when used with malevolent intent, to the bankruptcy of formal and stylised speech in the face of despair, and finally, to what extent speech and narrative can provide redemption, in their ability to provide connections and continuity. The significance of speech and rhetoric were popular points of discussion in the sixteenth century, influenced by a renewed focus on classical philosophy and particularly the work of Cicero in Renaissance Humanism. Humanism placed emphasis on "the imitation of classical models" in eloquence and rhetoric, elevating the "power of the word" in civilised society (Gray 502-3). Language was going through a period of rapid change in the period; David Crystal confirms that "about four times as many words came into English between 1500 and 1700 than did between 1200 and 1500 […] a growth from around 100,000 words in 1500 to 150,000 in 1600" (Crystal 19-20). Such expansion and advancement of language benefitted the renewed Humanist interest in linguistics and oration, contributing to an elevation of language and "good" speech which became synonymous with civility (Richards *Rhetoric* 64).

However, there was a certain amount of ambivalence surrounding this veneration of language. Jennifer Richards points out that rhetoric was constantly felt to be "in decline" in the sixteenth century, never quite living up to nostalgic imaginings of a "more virtuous, mythical age" and the period became increasingly concerned about the potentially ruinous influence of rhetoric on right-thinking minds (Richards *Rhetoric and Courtliness in Early Modern Literature* 66-67; Rebhorn 3). Richards argues that the emergence of Humanism as a movement of "linguistic and social reform" resulted in keen debates surrounding the power of rhetoric and the precarious position it occupied between persuasion and manipulation (Richards 65). While the Humanist movement sought to distinguish between rhetoric and sophistry, the problem remained that the intention of rhetoric was not solely to establish truth or consensus, but to persuade, convince, and "clinch the victory in the war of words" (Grey 498; Peltonen 9). Despite the cultural veneration of eloquence and its status within literary and legal education,

rhetoric's theoretical indifference to the pursuit of truth and justice prompted public concern. Such contradictions resulted in eloquence and persuasive speech being regarded with a certain moral ambivalence and this is a difficulty that we see both Hieronimo and Titus grapple with. Alongside influential Humanist philosophy, legal changes also had a part to play in the preoccupation with rhetoric and speech in literary texts of this period.[23] Increasingly comprehensive regulation of "speech acts" stemming from Henry VIII's 1534 statute of treason by words, and including the criminalisation of abusive speech, defamation, sedition and "disorderly speech" (speech that criticised political and religious authority), resulted in an enhanced concern with the political implications of words in the period (Lemon 8; Spaeth 2).

Speech has significant links with justice, and with textual legacy, for Hieronimo and Titus, both of whom employ classical quotation, rhetorical device, and legal language, both in their justification of their intentions, and in their entreaties for the gods to aid retribution and restore a sense of balance. But as violence escalates, and multiple wrongs vie to be righted, the power of words to influence those in power depletes. It is significant that while both protagonists have connections with rulers, they are not the source of authority. Unlike Atreus or Gorboduc, they do not hold sovereignty and so must appeal to those who do in order to propel the plot. In the opening scene of *Titus Andronicus*, Titus is required to use his rhetorical skill in a public address to restore the "people's hearts" to Saturninus, to "wean them from themselves" and make Saturninus emperor in his stead (I. i. 213-15). In exchange, Saturninus thanks Titus for his "unspeakable deserts" of patriotism and loyalty, and vows never to forget these favours lest Rome forget their allegiance to him (I. i. 260). "Unspeakable deserts" is an interesting turn of phrase, for it denotes the high esteem in which Titus is originally held and, of course, because Saturninus does forget Titus' loyalty to Rome fairly swiftly after the discovery of Bassianus' body, which results in the partially echoed phrase of "wrongs unspeakable" (V. iii. 125). The phrase foregrounds his later loss of speech and autonomy.

[23] There has been extensive critical interest in the influence of Cicero and Humanism on rhetoric in the period, this chapter shall primarily focus on the two texts in question in line with the broader enquiry into the development of inheritance tropes in revenge tragedy, but a more detailed analysis can be found in Jennifer Richards, *Rhetoric* (2008), Neil Rhodes, *The Power of Eloquence and English Renaissance Literature* (1992), Diane Parkin-Speer, "Freedom of Speech in Sixteenth Century English Rhetorics" (1981), and David Colclough, *Freedom of Speech in Early Stuart England* (2005).

In a similar turn of phrase, Marcus addresses the Roman citizens in the final scene in a petition to crown Lucius after Saturninus' death and speaks of the "wrongs unspeakable" his family have endured under the emperor (V. iii. 125). This twinning of the word "unspeakable" at the open and close of the action is compelling;[24] the phrase is not used elsewhere in the text but is employed in the first and last scene to convey not only the conventional "fall" of the tragic hero from "deserts" to "wrongs" but also, the significance of speech in this trajectory and the relative "tragedy" of its absence or misuse. Language falls from grace in these texts, particularly conventional, formal, and rhetorical language, which increasingly appears to serve no purpose for Hieronimo and Titus. In *Shakespeare and the Origins of English*, Neil Rhodes argues that *Titus Andronicus* embodies a hybridity between civility and barbarism, both Roman and native, Latin and vernacular, classical and *anti*-classical (Rhodes *Shakespeare and the Origins of English* 135-40). Rhodes considers the primary concerns of *Titus Andronicus* to revolve around hybridity, anachronism and cultural conflict, and describes how classical and literary references are consistently used in opposition to anti-classical, or barbarous, ones (Rhodes *Shakespeare and the Origins of English* 140). I would argue that the veneration, and subsequent disintegration, of language is perhaps the most significant way in which both these texts embrace this sense of ambivalence and hybridity. Both protagonists become increasingly disassociated from contemporary ideas about "the civilizing power of speech", and while language and justice are initially intertwined for the protagonists, and rhetoric is positioned as the only civilized route to retribution, as the acts of spectacular violence escalate, victims go unheard and language becomes hollow (Luckyj 39).

I begin my analysis by exploring the development of revenge drama from the declamatory Senecan tradition and go on to consider speech as the meeting point of inherited civilization and individual expression in contemporary thought. Following this, I examine how *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus* explore the language of grief, its role and its efficacy and redundancy in the face of loss. I consider the significance of persuasive language in these texts, and their ambivalence towards rhetoric and civilizing speech. Both plays contemplate language versus "harmless silence" in their final scenes

[24] In light of the argument for co-authorship, I would argue that whether Shakespeare or Peele were responsible for Act 1, there is a distinct repetition and adaptation of this phrasing by the author of the Act 5 (widely considered to be Shakespeare).

and, in conclusion, I review the ways in which both plays consider narrative as a form of legacy (*TST*. IV. iv. 181). Speech becomes increasingly subjective and inaccessible for Hieronimo and Titus, an isolating force, rather than a communal, collective inheritance. Building upon this claim, I shall examine the ongoing uncertainty surrounding collective understanding and recognition and consider whether the plays ultimately consider speech to be a corrupting or redemptive influence.

Revenge Tragedy and the Senecan tragic

Much of the analysis surrounding the emerging genre of revenge tragedy in the sixteenth century has deliberated upon the recurrent dichotomy of personal and public justice and the striking use of violence as spectacle. Both Linda Woodbridge and Chris McMahon identify one of the most consistent motifs of the genre as the notion of "exchange": whether that be financial, judicial or political (Woodbridge *English Revenge Drama* 4; McMahon 1). Revenge plays commonly centre on unpaid debts, unfair advantages and unpunished crimes, all wrongs which the genre dictates must be repaid in kind. Woodbridge suggests that it is this type of "obligation debt" that drives the genre of revenge tragedy, whether that debt be to a loved one, to the state, or to God (Woodbridge *English Revenge Drama* 89; 105). Yet while protagonists may intend to participate in this economy of debt in order to reinstate balance and to ease their grief by "neutralising" the original crime with its equal in exchange, they habitually (and inevitably) escalate violence in the Senecan style of *maius nefas*. In the subsequent analysis, I will expand this notion of "exchange" to consider representations of speech and communication in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus* and discuss how verbal exchanges might interact with prevailing themes of violence and justice in this type of revenge economy.

In *Shakespeare, Revenge Tragedy and Early Modern Law,* Derek Dunne identifies the "linguistically-fraught atmosphere*"* of these early revenge dramas, "where words mean power [and] 'wrongs unspeakable' provoke verbal paralysis" (Dunne 61). This notion of "verbal paralysis" is explored in both plays in the violent spectacle of the loss of the tongue: Lavinia is left a "map of woe" in *Titus Andronicus* after her tongue is violently cut out, and Hieronimo defiantly bites out his own rather than speak any more in the final scenes of *The Spanish Tragedy* (*TA*. III. ii. 12). The use of the grotesque is one of the

most commonly remarked upon features of these plays, and, of course, one of the most striking ways these early revenge plots differed from classical tragedy which traditionally kept violence offstage. Detractors have disparaged this inclination as lurid sensationalism, but I would argue that such unsettling onstage violence serves a vital function in the plays' consideration of language, for in bringing these violent spectacles to the forefront of the action, Kyd and Shakespeare powerfully demonstrate how language fractures in the face of despair. In Seneca, a messenger routinely delivers news of violent deaths in a long and detailed oration, but while authors of revenge tragedy borrowed much from Senecan rhetoric, in bringing the violence onstage they illustrate how impotent language can be. The ability to enact and/or comprehend violence with words seems a pertinent concern of these plays and the following discussion shall consider the various representations and functions of speech in late sixteenth-century English revenge tragedy, ranging from appropriated literary oration to the dangers of persuasive rhetoric.

The Spanish Tragedy and *Titus Andronicus* are both relatively early examples of the genre that would later be termed "revenge tragedy", and two of the most frequently performed and referenced (Woodbridge *English Revenge Drama* 4; Weber 701-2). Heavily influenced by the works of Seneca and the mid-sixteenth century tragedies and translations, the plays represent a stage in the development of revenge drama that is often referred to as Neo-Latin; [25] typically favouring the development of contemporary narratives while maintaining references to classical precedents. Alongside onstage violence, another element of this emergent style that differs from Senecan tragedy is the social position of the protagonist; neither Hieronimo nor Titus are heads of state. The figureheads of power have a role to play in both dramas, but the central characters are essentially onlookers, adjacent to the social order. Derek Dunne confirms how "revenge tragedy would become notable for its portrayal of tragic heroes not drawn exclusively from the nobility", effectively creating a tragic protagonist who "seeks revenge on a system as much as any individual" (Dunne 47). It is also important to note that these tragedies operate in a relatively secular space, for while pagan and Christian gods are referenced in these texts, the sense of omnipotent predestination is less prominent than

[25] Neo-Latin can exclusively refer to early modern writing in Latin, but I use it in its broader sense, referring to texts written in English in the classical style.

in the classical tradition. I would argue that this is one reason why language plays such an important role in these plays: Hieronimo and Titus are not born into positions of power, or with a particularly strong conviction in predetermined fate, and consequently language is their most potent tool to advise, influence and persuade those in authority, and ultimately change their course of events. This is, of course, one of the reasons why rhetorical flair caused such unease in the period, as its influence threatened to disrupt the hierarchical social order. The emphasis placed on eloquence and persuasion in early modern Humanism jeopardized the philosophy of inherited rule as it threatened to incite a shift in the dynamics of power towards a more modern democratic style. This is point outlined in the opening of *Titus Andronicus*, where the inherited rule of Saturninus is uncertain and only secured by Titus' appeal for support (Stacey 65). The figurative curse of Hieronimo and Titus is their increasing inability to influence the world around them: they both search for reprieve in formalised, communal speech but it becomes hollow, and justice becomes inaccessible as their voices become inaudible. Rather than a curséd fate, these protagonists battle against a range of corporeal adversities, such as human duplicity, hierarchical legal systems, and diminishing social influence; yet both still rally against a familiar sense of inevitability in their tragic circumstance.

The use of classical and legal language both denotes Hieronimo and Titus' "middling status" as educated advisors and advocates and evidences the transition of tragedy from classical translations in the Inns of Court, to commercial drama on the public stage (Dunne 47). Both plays engage with notions of a shared literary inheritance, primarily in the stylistic and thematic adaptations of classical narratives and quotations, including those of Seneca, Ovid, Virgil and Horace. *Titus Andronicus* in particular, takes the appropriation of classical language for a contemporary purpose as one of its major themes, and emphasises the rhetorical skill and responsibility required of those orators who call upon classical narratives and phrases in their expression of self. Rhetorical skill in the classical style was widely revered as the definitive display of civility in early modern intellectual circles and philosophers and theorists alike deemed oration the "distinctively human faculty" that distinguished humankind from the animal kingdom (Luckyj 40). Christina Luckyj argues that contemporary humanist discourse represented speech as synonymous with "human agency and subjectivity" and I would like to demonstrate how along with the conventional "fall" of the tragic protagonist, *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus*

Andronicus establish an equivalent "fall" of speech itself (Luckyj 51). At the start of the plays, both Hieronimo and Titus assume advisor roles in the Spanish and Roman courts, Hieronimo as Knight Marshall and advocate, and Titus as champion of Saturninus; I will explore how the consequences of their conventionally "tragic" displacement from these roles interacts with the early modern intellectual, religious and social shifts concerning the role of language; including the ethical consequences of rhetorical speech, the efficacy of mourning in the face of grief and the powerful effects of language used to deceive.

Rhetorical tradition and "civilizing" speech

Selfhood, expressed and defined through speech, is a prominent motif in Seneca, where themes of self-containment and self-governance, articulated via internal dialogues, are commonplace (Bartsch and Schiesaro 5). Christopher Star analyses the expression of selfhood in Senecan tragedy and highlights the metatheatricality and "mythical self-fashioning" of the protagonists:

> As the characters enter the play "declaiming" their psychological conflict, they are simultaneously commanding themselves to be consistent and play their roles. These repeated instances of self-address and command provide important revelations of the psychology of Seneca's characters […] through the repetition of the figure of self-apostrophe, Seneca investigates and expands these ideas in his tragedies. This "rhetorical" language is in fact the means by which Seneca portrays the relationship between action and the emotions (Star 71; 73).

We can see these inherited themes revisited in Neo-Latin tragedy, particularly with their use of lengthy interior monologues, their incorporation of performance in revenge (such as the play-within-a-play or Titus' banquet) and their use of madness as a performance of self (as we see in Hieronimo's role as director, and Titus' feigned gullibility on encountering Tamora dressed as Revenge). In Act III sc. i, when Titus has his two sons' heads and his own severed hand returned to him, he laughs as though he can no longer accept the events as happening to himself. When Marcus questions his inappropriate behaviour, Titus claims he has "not another tear to shed" but returns to language, in the form of a vow, to keep them all from indulging in their sorrow and to underline their joint pursuit of justice:

> You heavy people, circle me about,

> That I may turn me to each one of you,
> And swear unto my soul to right your wrongs.
> The vow is made (*TA*. III. i. 266; 277-80).

Hieronimo says something similar to Bel-Imperia in Act VI sc. i of *The Spanish Tragedy*:

> And here I vow—so you but give consent,
> And will conceal my resolution
> I will ere long determine of their deaths
> That causeless thus have murdered my son (*TST.* IV. i. 41-4).

Both Hieronimo and Titus use vows to articulate their debt to the past, and to split their public and private selves. Language becomes crucial in differentiating themselves from their performance. Their use of multiple addresses, various quotations, and different languages muddles the expression of the self in these plays, where audiences are invited to identify the authentic dialogue amongst a cacophony of disputants. Hieronimo and Titus become estranged from their former selves and the play-world around them, and in these scenes, we witness how the performance of speech denotes a severance in the narrative. As the protagonists' revenge obligation becomes clear, they gather their support in a shared vow to initiate a renewed narrative of retribution and justice.

However, this use of speech in differentiating various selves also highlights the use of language to deceive and the practical power of eloquence (Rhodes *The Power of Eloquence* 26). Alongside drama, the art of rhetoric was another area of classical inheritance given prominence in the sixteenth century. And while rhetoric was broadly recognised as one of the "grander" arts and, to some extent, a "civilizing force" within society, the risks surrounding this "practical power" and influence were not underestimated (Mann 208). Jennifer Richards asserts that "the rhetorical confidence of the early humanists [and] their attempts to recover the vital culture of republican Rome" were gradually replaced in the mid sixteenth century with an increasingly "entrenched scepticism concerning the capacity of rhetoric to persuade citizens to act virtuously" (Richards *Rhetoric* 66-7). Disputes over whether the art of rhetoric pursued virtue or power, and whether so-called "civilized speech" sought to persuade or manipulate, resulted in an increasing unease surrounding language and its influence on early modern morality, religion and politics. The more extreme end of these negative connotations saw

rhetoric aligned with incantatory prayer, Catholic practice, and the “dark arts” of magic and witchcraft, and secular criticism commonly condemned rhetoric as the “art of lying” and expressed concern over the potential moral and political implications of the practice (Rhodes *The Power of Eloquence* 8; Rebhorn 6). The morality of language used to persuade was a prominent concern of the period and the limitations of rhetoric, offering only “probable, not absolute truths” and knowledge that was inevitably “relative and contingent”, called its intellectual virtues into question (Rebhorn 7-8). Often, it was the pleasing aesthetic qualities of rhetoric that were used as evidence of its deviance, for its “flowers” were frequently associated with distraction, or even enchantment, that sought to manipulate the listener (Richards *Rhetoric* 66-7). Richards observes that even the defences of rhetoric in this period reveal a “preoccupation with the regulation of language [that] is uncomfortably associated with social and political control” (Richards *Rhetoric* 70). Anxieties surrounding the opposition between the lofty ideals of language as representative of humanity and civility, and its darker underside of deceit and manipulation, can be detected throughout *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus.* Both Hieronimo and Titus are initially fully invested in the social advantages of language but gradually lose faith in its ability to instigate an impartial “dialogue” or “exchange” in pursuit of justice.

Yet, the importance of speech in these two texts extends beyond the construction of the plot and the development of the characters, and into its performativity. The “exalted grandeur” of inherited rhetorical style resulted in the highly-stylised series of revenge tragedies performed in the 1580s and 1590s; plays that revelled in the “style which shows” (McDonald 26). In *The Senecan Aesthetic: A Performance History* Helen Slaney observes a key difference between the plays of this period and drama which emerged later in the seventeenth century. Slaney considers Senecan-inspired plays such as *The Spanish Tragedy*, and to a lesser extent *Titus Andronicus,* to inhabit an earlier “theatre of the word, in which an actor’s role consisted of the effective delivery of a text” rather than in later drama when an actor’s role “came to consist of the effective portrayal of a character”(Slaney 7). Palfrey and Stern corroborate this observation in their analysis of the practices of the early modern theatre in *Shakespeare in Parts,* where they suggest that actors would likely have learnt (and in some cases rehearsed) their lines in isolation, divorced from the “play text” as a whole, resulting in the delivery of speeches as discrete

packages, rather than as component parts of a plot (Palfrey and Stern).[26] This style is evident in both *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus*, and is pertinent for our discussion of speech because it plays with notions of the expression of self and inherited language. The characters in these plays use "borrowed" language, in exalted speeches; they take part in the social trappings of speech, such as mourning speech, but frequently do so in isolation. During moments of intense emotion, the characters often speak in alternate monologues, rather than dialogue; there is rarely a sense of exchange with those present on stage, but their elevated, reference-laden style frequently implies connections with precedents, and potentially the audience too.

One of the most illustrative examples of this classically-inspired inclination to use literary and ornamental language to describe emotive and gruesome subjects is Marcus' highly-stylised reaction to Lavinia's brutalization in *Titus Andronicus.* Helen Slaney argues that such examples demonstrate the Senecan penchant to portray the throes of intense emotion through rhetoric:

> Where mimetic authenticity would require the voice to fail, or speech to be replaced by inarticulate cries, Senecan characters continue instead to verbalize their distress. Metaphor opens up otherwise inaccessible interiors (Slaney 19).

Marcus' rhetorical response in this scene is so seemingly incongruous that many modern directors choose to cut the scene altogether (Luckyj 43). However, I would argue that this scene is crucial in understanding how the play reflects on the function of language. Marcus' classically-inspired, heightened articulation and mythological metaphors in the face of despair would have been familiar conventions for the audience. However, while classical violence often occurs offstage, Lavinia is placed front and centre in this scene; indeed, she is seen attempting to hide for fear of such stark exposure ("thou turnest away your face for shame") (II. iv. 28). Heather James confirms that Virgil's *Aeneid* "habitually exploits differences between violent events and their ornate descriptions" and here we can see Shakespeare building upon contemporary anxieties regarding the

[26] There is some debate over how much context would have been provided to a player, with some critics suggesting that actors would have only been given single cue lines, and others suggesting that the uniformity of cue lines such as "my lord" would have made this unlikely. More information on this debate can be found in Kathryn Moncrief, Kathryn McPherson and Sarah Enloe's *Shakespeare Expressed* and Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern's *Shakespeare in Parts*.

trustworthiness of rhetoric in this scene, where the familiar verbosity of the tragic soliloquy contrasts starkly with the jarring visual imagery of Lavinia (James 61). The scene demonstrates the significance of textual adaptations in *Titus;* where quotations and references are not simply used as "ornamentation" or even validation, but as triggers, whose meanings are absorbed, transformed, mutilated and "digested" to exacerbate the horror of the plot (James "Mutilating Titus, Vergil and Rome").

Yet the classical literary inheritance evident in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus* goes far beyond rhetorical style. Both plays include an inherited mythological history, Latin quotations, and feature the physical presence of classical texts on stage. As we have discussed, Hieronimo is widely considered to be carrying a copy of Seneca during the famous *vindicta mihi* soliloquy and Titus learns the identity of his daughters' rapists through a copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Barker and Hinds 64; III. xiii. 1). The Latin *vindicta mihi* or "vengeance is mine" is taken from the Romans 12:19 but the following excerpts in which Hieronimo is reading from the book in his hand are from Seneca's *Agamemnon* and *Troades* (Barker and Hinds 64). Hieronimo is seen reading directly from and adapting his source and we see here how the play's vengeance rhetoric and exalted speech is littered with citations. Shakespeare uses the physical presence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in a similar way when Lavinia uses the text to re-establish her voice and communicate the details of her attack. Lavinia "busily […] turns the leaves" of the text and uses the tale of Tereus' rape of Philomel and the Latin *stuprum* inscribed into the dirt to accuse the perpetrators and resume her role within the plot (IV. i. 45). The heavy use of antecedent materials in the plays demonstrates both a conventional reverence for the foundational classical influences on tragedy and an attempt to adapt and enhance the work of preceding authors to augment the impact of the narrative in the minds of a contemporary audience.

Both plays explore connections between the inheritance and transfer of power, and the inheritance and transfer of knowledge through shared language and historical precedent. However, the importance of the text in *Titus Andronicus* is particularly pertinent. Neil Rhodes argues that many of Shakespeare's works are heterogeneous, but that *Titus* fits this pattern in particular, "[…] and self-consciously so, because the play is actually about hybridity" (Rhodes *Shakespeare and the Origins of English* 140). This

sense of hybridity integrates the Senecan structure and Ovidian and Virgilian allusions with thematic concerns about inherited rhetoric, ceremonial and ritualistic language. Classical reference and rhetorical influence are frequently used as a precursor to violence in *Titus,* problematising associations of eloquence with civility and reinforcing notions of the dangers of persuasion. Rhodes confirms how the play is full of ideas surrounding assimilation and integration, and how the past might be incorporated into the present, with the use of Latin and the vernacular, and Roman, Goth, and Elizabethan references used in deliberately anachronistic conjunction (Rhodes *Shakespeare and the Origins of English* 140).

Characters frequently use classical precedent as inspiration for their actions and employ allusion as a way of sanctioning violence. Early modern playwrights adapted and revised inherited classical themes and conventions in the style of *imitatio* or *emulation,* in a conscious attempt to incorporate a cultural and literary history they regarded as both worthy and relevant to a contemporary audience. Familiarity with the classics and an understanding of Latin was acquired in schools and universities and became an important skillset in early modern intellectual circles, and one endorsed by the Queen herself who enjoyed the practice of Latin translation and permitted Neo-Latin drama in court (Norland 481). The emerging genre of revenge tragedy was arguably the most prominent example of the type of "Senecan rhetoric [that] enveloped the English stage in the late sixteenth century" (Ward 79). Eugene Vance argues that medieval and Renaissance culture "saw history itself as a process of translation" emerging from "the twin doctrines of *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii*" (Vance 312). *Translatio imperii,* the "translation" or "carrying-over" of power or rule is a familiar theme of tragedy with its focus on governing families and their succession but I would like to argue that these two plays in particular emphasise the notion of *translatio studii* and demonstrate problematic successions of knowledge and understanding in both form and content (Bellamy 70). The Senecan notion of *maius nefas,* appears significant in the perpetrator's attempts to out-do their predecessors, and mirrors somewhat early modern authors' attempts to enhance the work of their classical counterparts. It is Aaron who first refers to Lavinia as "Philomel" in his plotting of Chiron and Demetrius' attack and the brothers mock Lavinia's greater loss in comparison with her predecessor ("if thy stumps will let thee, play the scribe") (II. iv. 4). Like Lavinia, Philomel has her tongue cut out by her rapists in order that she should not reveal their

identities but used her hands to weave a tapestry that told her story. Chiron and Demetrius have removed this possibility for Lavinia and in so doing achieved *maius nefas* with their attempt to "improve the story" (Weber 707). Dramatically, such referencing recreates the type of oft-lamented historical feud so familiar from classical tragedy and foreshadows the legacy of such violent acts down the generations.

Twentieth-century criticism frequently questioned *Titus Andronicus*' literary significance due to its perceived indulgence in sensationalism, with many quoting either T. S Eliot's accusation that it was "one of the stupidest and most uninspired plays ever written", or Edward Ravenscroft's equally damning statements in the preface to his 1687 edition, bemoaning the many structural revisions he felt were necessary to such "a heap of rubbish" (Eliot 67; Ravenscroft). Paul Innes argues that while tragedy is unavoidably a gory genre, *Titus Andronicus* appears to operate as "a sort of limit text, a tragedy that extends tragic logic as far as possible to see what happens" (Innes 28). I would argue that the violence of Lavinia's attack serves to underline the complicated relationship between violence and language and to emphasise the irony of a habitual demand for language in the face of its impotence. Titus' woes go beyond understanding, and yet Titus and the other characters try relentlessly to contextualise and shape their experience through words. In this sense we can see how the play might be invested in a test of boundaries, of both the audience's sympathies, and of the characters' perseverance in their understanding of language as salvation.

After much protest, the members of the Andronici that have borne the brunt of the violence eventually surrender themselves to silence. Lavinia, of course, has silence enforced on her twice, once at the hands of her rapists, and again at the hands of her father. Heather James argues that Lavinia's silence demonstrates a metatheatrical exploration of character without dialogue and agency without expression:

> Marcus' speech "fails" extravagantly because he can only blunder ahead verbally with no assurance that he is speaking for Lavinia instead of imposing his own emotions and words on her. He is unable surely to inhabit Lavinia's thoughts and emotions, and so he falls into an epistemological abyss - a "pit" in the terms of the play (James "Blazoning Injustices" 67).

Lavinia's loss of her virginity and her ability to speak are presented in parallel as a loss of agency. Marcus describes her tongue as the "delightful engine of her thoughts" that

has been “torn from forth that pretty hollow cage” (III. i. 83-5). Lavinia’s status as “Rome’s rich ornament” and her ability to communicate her autonomy are destroyed by her attackers and the horror of this extreme loss of identity is presented on stage (I. i. 55). The role of speech (eloquence) as illustrative of humanity and civility in a classical universe and the essentiality of speech (dialogue) within a theatrical context intermingle in this scene. Lavinia is symbolically deprived of interiority while the onstage actor is literally without expression, and in the illustration of Lavinia as a spectacle of silence, the significance of speech is doubly underlined. One of the foremost concerns for Lavinia is not her wounded body, but her incapacitated tongue. Lavinia’s ability to lament her sorrows has been obliterated and, upon finding his injured niece, Marcus offers to express grief on her behalf and act as verbal proxy. After asking several times in succession for Lavinia to speak (“Cousin, a word”; “Speak, gentle niece”; “Why dost not speak to me?”) Marcus realizes her incapacity and attempts to speak on her behalf:

> Shall I speak for thee? Shall I say 'tis so?
> O, that I knew thy heart; and knew the beast,
> That I might rail at him, to ease my mind!
> Sorrow concealed, like an oven stopp'd,
> Doth burn the heart to cinders where it is
> (II. iii. 12; 16; 21; II. iv. 33-7).

Marcus considers Lavinia’s silence to be destructive. He believes “railing” would ease both their minds, but as Lavinia’s ability to express her sorrow has been cruelly taken from her, her suffering will be directed inward, burning her “heart to cinders where it is”. Lavinia’s grief and misery are described in physical terms, a sickness which must be purged in order that she should recover. As Marcus leads Lavinia away to find Titus, he says “Do not draw back, for we will mourn with thee / O, could our mourning ease thy misery!” (II. iv. 56-7). Here, the notion that human emotion can only be purged through its physical and audible expression is reaffirmed.

Wrongs unspeakable: mourning and lament

The expression of grief is one of most prominent conventions of the revenge genre, one which requires an empathetic response from the audience, and yet, in early modern tragedy, it is often when the Senecan preference for high-rhetoric over mimetic realism is the most evident. Dialogue is arguably at its most eloquent and allusion-laden at these

points, and while these speeches may not have achieved what we might call realism in a modern context, they likely held significance for a contemporary audience in their reflection of the importance of the verbalisation of grief. As we have discussed, the favoured style of the period was for “art that was obviously art” and not for the type of interiority or character development that became fashionable in the seventeenth century (McDonald 30). Tragedy in particular was considered to be a lofty and scholarly art form with fairly rigid conventions and traditions that audiences were familiar with and consequently, the type of naturalistic dialogue a modern reader may expect was neither the intent of the playwright, nor the expectation of the audience; instead “the Senecan actor remains conscious of his own artifice, inviting the audience to share in maintaining a sophisticated illusion” (Slaney 21).

In the 1589 *The Arte of English Poesie,* George Puttenham emphasises the important function of “poeticall lamentations” as a particular type of catharsis that allows the mourner to “poure forth […] inward sorrowes and the greefs wherewith his minde is surcharged” (Puttenham, Puttenham and Lumley 61). He recommends that the poet’s words should be used like medicine to “mak[e] the very greef it selfe […] cure of the disease” (Puttenham, Puttenham and Lumley 61). Stephen Pender asserts that writers such as Puttenham drew on classical precedents in their understanding of grief as “susceptible to poetic and rhetorical cure” (Pender 72). Eloquence was frequently understood to fulfil a “medical-moral purpose” in relieving the physical and emotional symptoms of grief (Pender 76). We see this concept reflected in *The Spanish Tragedy* where the expression of grief is initially considered paramount, and the importance of speech in mourning is underlined. Hieronimo views speech as both indicator of life and lessener of grief, first pleading with Horatio to “speak, if any spark of life remain” before asking his wife to mourn with him to ease their pain: “Here, Isabella, help me to lament” (II. iv. 79; II. iv. 98). It is interesting that Hieronimo does not simply invite his wife to help him grieve, but to lament. The OED defines “lament” as “a passionate or demonstrative expression of grief” and as “a set or conventional form of mourning; a song of grief, an elegy” ("Lament, V."). The verbal *expression* of grief is crucial for Hieronimo who believes that “with words tears are stayed” (II. iv. 110). The Viceroy of Portingale corroborates this view and under the misapprehension that his son, Balthazar, is dead, affirms that

"complaining makes my grief seem less" (I. iii. 32). Lamenting and "complaining" are here depicted as crucial aspects of the mourning process.

However, public confidence in the redemptive qualities of speech in mourning and the intimate associations between "rhetoric and medicine, language and virtue in early modernity" were complicated by Reformist attitudes that frequently associated elegy and lament with Catholic purgatorial rhetoric (Pender 72; Goodland 101). Formalised intercessory Catholic prayers for the dead, or "post mortem provisions", were prohibited by 1547 when "purgatory was decreed as non-biblical [and] the intercession of saints […] was rejected, for faith in Christ eliminated the need for mediation with God" (Tingle 7). The concern that lamentations embodied an attempt at communication with the dead and that mourning rituals functioned as a type of transaction, anticipating a loved one's deliverance from purgatory in exchange for prayers, became increasingly problematic in post-Reformation England. The role of lamentations as either relief for the living, or as assistance for the dead, was in flux in the public imagination and we see this ambivalence played out in the grief of Horatio's parents in *The Spanish Tragedy*. Isabella adopts the traditional approach of mourning her son, of "tears, fountains and floods of tears", and reasons that all sin will ultimately be punished by God, if not by the courts: "The heavens are just; murder cannot be hid. / Time is the author of both truth and right, / And time will bring this treachery to light" (II. v. 105; 119-121). However, although Hieronimo's instinctive response is to participate in lamentation for his son, within fifty lines he has changed his mind and concludes that this would only hinder their efforts to find justice:

> Meanwhile, good Isabella, cease thy plaints,
> Or at least dissemble them a while;
> So shall we sooner find the practice out,
> And learn by whom all this was brought about (II. iv. 98; 122-5).

Hieronimo resolves that mourning speech must be "dissemble[d] a while" as it would ultimately prolong their pursuit of justice and delay them finding peace. Rather than "complaint" making the grief "seem less", Hieronimo decides that, in this case, it would have the opposite effect, suspecting that the murderer left Horatio's "bloody corpse dishonoured" so his father should "drown [him] with an ocean of [..] tears", and in so doing, be distracted (II. iv. 83-5). Hieronimo concludes that the required "exchange" is not with Horatio, but with his assailant, and that his grief will not be quieted in tears or

lamentations for his dead son, but in avenging his murder. Hieronimo delays the mourning of Horatio until vengeance has been achieved, when at the close of the action he reveals the "spectacle" of his corpse, and he summons the language of lament:

> Here lay my hope, and here my hope hath end;
> Here lay my heart, and here my heart was slain;
> Here lay my treasure, here my treasure lost;
> Here lay my bliss, and here my bliss bereft (IV. iv. 88; 89-92).

After the reveal of Horatio's body, Hieronimo continues for sixty-four lines, memorialising Horatio's death and confessing the vengeance he has enacted on his murderers, but his reasoning is not heard or accepted, and he is asked "why" three times in succession from the King, the Viceroy, and Castile: "Why hast thou done this undeserving deed?" (IV. iv. 165).

We see a similar pattern of disengagement with mourning speech in *Titus Andronicus* as the crimes against the Andronici continue to mount. After Lavinia's ability to communicate has been stolen from her, she becomes a "speechless complainer" and her role becomes symbolic of meaning without language:

> Thou map of woe, that thus dost talk in signs!
> When thy poor heart beats with outrageous beating,
> Thou canst not strike it thus to make it still.
> Wound it with sighing, girl, kill it with groans;
> Or get some little knife between thy teeth,
> And just against thy heart make thou a hole;
> That all the tears that thy poor eyes let fall
> May run into that sink, and soaking in,
> Drown the lamenting fool in sea-salt tears (III. ii. 39; 12-20).

Titus' interpretation of Lavinia's suffering centres on the fact that she cannot put her sorrows into words. The description of her "poor heart" becomes personified and her symptoms take on the physicality and urgency of an "outrageous beating" that cannot be stilled by the purgation of language. The heart becomes the "lamenting fool", desperate to express the grief that Lavinia must suppress. This description of Lavinia's heart is interesting for it could be argued that Titus later sees himself as the "lamenting fool" as he observes language become increasingly detached from meaning.

Marcus begs his brother to "let reason govern [his] lament" after his two sons are accused of Bassianus' murder and Titus responds with "If there were reason for these miseries, / Then into limits could I bind my woes" (III. i. 219; 33-4). Here we see how structured mourning practices no longer make sense to Titus: the disintegration of "reason" or meaning in his grief has resulted in a physical incapacitation which renders him weak. Titus' bodily description of grief describes how the fight has been taken out of him:

> Then must my earth with her continual tears
> Become a deluge overflowed and drowned,
> For why my bowels cannot hide her woes,
> But like a drunkard must I vomit them.
> Then give me leave, for losers will have leave
> To ease their stomachs with their bitter tongues (229-234).

Titus becomes "overflowed and drowned" by the physical symptoms of mourning and describes the compulsion to vent his woes in the bodily language of expending the contents of the stomach. Compelled to "vomit" out his laments, Titus no longer sees any meaning in his words but continues to utter them in habitual speech patterns. This description relates to the ongoing metaphorical connection between language and consumption in the play and returns to earlier themes of consumption in *Thyestes*. The preoccupation with the tongue's civilizing capacity in the Roman state is contrasted with the tongue as a corporal instrument of consumption and digestion, culminating in the abominable banquet in the penultimate scene.

When Titus' woes reach their limit and the heads of his sons and his own severed hand are returned to him in mockery of his ritualistic offering, Marcus acquiesces and grants his brother leave to rally:

> MARCUS: […] These miseries are more than can be borne.
> To weep with them that weep doth ease some deal,
> But sorrow flouted at is double-death
> […] Ah, now no more will I control thy griefs
> Rend off thy silver hair, thy other hand
> Gnawing with thy teeth, and be this dismal sight
> The closing up of our most wretched eyes
> Now is a time to storm. Why art thou still? (III. i. 244-6; 260-4).

Marcus reiterates the notion that to "weep with them that weep" eases grief and grants his brother permission to "storm" at the "double-death" of accumulating miseries that cannot be comprehended. However, at this point Titus lets out an incongruous laugh and responds:

> TITUS: […] I have not another tear to shed
> Besides, this sorrow is an enemy
> And would usurp upon my watery eyes
> And make them blind with tributary tears
> Then which way shall I find Revenge's cave? (III. i. 268-71).

Titus resolves that the verbal expressions of grief are "enemies", a mere indulgence that attempt to distract him, in a sentiment similar to the passage in *The Spanish Tragedy* when Hieronimo tells Isabella that the sooner they "cease [their] plaints" the sooner they will be able enact revenge. Perhaps there is a sense of feeling deceived here, for the socially sanctioned act of mourning does not suffice; it does not relieve Hieronimo or Titus' sorrows but only deters them from action. Again, we see recurring concerns about the power of rhetoric to deceive and distract, but in lament it seems it is Hieronimo and Titus' own words that have effectively enacted the deception. Titus' analogy of being blinded by tears and unable to find his way to "Revenge's cave" demonstrates how he must supress his lamentations to regain control of his narrative.

This understanding is reinforced in the following scene, when, in a reversal of previous events, Titus asks Marcus to temper his displays of grief, chastising him: "Thy niece and I, poor creatures, want our hands / And cannot passionate our tenfold grief / With folded arms" (III. ii. 5-7). He then goes on to mock the futility of words and lament, by highlighting Marcus' insensitive use of the word "hand":

> Ah, wherefore does thou urge the name of hands
> […] O handle not the theme, to talk of hands,
> Lest we remember still that we have none.
> Fie, fie, how franticly I square my talk
> As if we should forget we had no hands
> If Marcus did not name the word of hands (III. ii. 26-33).

He begins by scorning Marcus for using the "name of hands" and reminding Lavinia and himself of their loss, but then corrects himself by pointing out that, regardless of language, it would be ridiculous to suggest that they might forget such an absence. This passage

emphasises the linguistic power of words in its repetition of “name of hands”, “theme of hands”, “talk of hands”, “word of hands”, but then ridicules itself for desiring to “square” the speech surrounding hands. “Square” in this context likely meant to “regulate” or “adapt” and Titus highlights the power attributed to words and its apparent emptiness in the face of true sorrow ("Square, V."). One of the most curious exchanges in *Titus Andronicus* occurs in this scene, when the seemingly innocuous act of swatting a fly becomes the source of an argument between Titus and Marcus:

> TITUS: Out on thee murderer. Thou kill’st my heart.
> Mine eyes are cloyed with view of tyranny;
> A deed of death done on the innocent
> Becomes not Titus’ brother. Get thee gone;
> I see thou art not for my company.
>
> MARCUS: Alas, my lord, I have but killed a fly.
>
> TITUS: ‘But?’
> How if that fly had a father and mother?
> How would he hang his slender gilded wings
> And buzz lamenting doings in the air.
> Poor harmless fly,
> That with his pretty buzzing melody
> Came here to make us merry, and thou hast killed him (III. ii. 54-66).

As Charlotte Scott points out, the fact that these lines are not present in the original 1597 quarto but are added later in the 1623 version has meant that the significance of the fly exchange has often been overlooked (Scott 256). The most prominent argument for the significance of this scene has been that Titus’ preoccupation with the anthropomorphic understanding of the fly, which after the sight of his dead sons and raped and mutilated daughter has been understood to be indicative of Titus’ growing state of madness (Scott 256). Indeed, Marcus says as much after the discussion has concluded: “Alas, poor man! Grief has so wrought on him / He takes false shadows for true substances” (III. ii. 80-1).

However, there are alternative allusions present in the dialogue on the fly; this frivolous exchange could demonstrate Titus’ distain for what he observes to be a “deed of death done on the innocent”, a stance which seems at odds with the earlier Titus, who condemned his disobedient son, and the innocent Alarbus to a violent death. Titus’ interpretation of Marcus using his power, or “tyranny”, to end a perceived “lesser” life no doubt reminds him, and the audience, of earlier events. The context of that life, with its

imagined mother and father also resonates with Titus, provoking the memories of Tamora begging for her son's life. However, Titus appears to fixate on the "lamenting doings" and "buzzing melody" of the fly. Considering that prior to the appearance of the fly, the banquet scene primarily focuses on Lavinia's incapacity to communicate and Titus' attempt to "interpret all her martyred signs", this pitiful description of the fly (and indeed the family of said fly) lamenting their misfortunes into the air appears to mock the futility of language in the face of despair (III. ii. 34). Perhaps for Titus at this stage in the action, all laments seem empty "buzzings", providing more comfort in the physicality of their utterance than in the efficacy of their meaning. Titus highlights that even the fly has mourners left behind performing their laments to no avail and mocks the meaninglessness of customary language and unheard supplications. As language becomes progressively devoid of meaning, Titus vows to interpret Lavinia's gestures and create an alphabet of action:

> Thou shalt not sigh, nor hold thy stumps to heaven,
> Nor wink, nor nod, nor kneel, nor make a sign,
> But I of these will wrest an alphabet
> And by still practice learn to know thy meaning (III. ii. 42-5).

Titus seeks to "wrest" or "derive" an alternative to language in Lavinia's signs, for words can no longer be physically spoken by Lavinia, and, we understand, are insufficient to express the woes of the Andronici ("Wrest, V."). Titus warns his grandson that the verbal expression of sorrow is not only futile, but potentially dangerous, for "tears will quickly melt thy life away" (III. ii. 51).

Words more sweet and yet more dangerous

However, it is not only the social function of speech that becomes complicated in *Titus Andronicus* and *The Spanish Tragedy,* but also the subjectivity of speech, its lack of objective truth and the power of eloquence when deliberately used to deceive. The opening scenes of Kyd's play introduce the audience to various accounts of Don Andrea's death. We hear the account relayed by Andrea himself from the underworld in Senecan-style and a second account from a Spanish General in the following scene. One might question why Kyd might give the audience the same information twice in succession, but on closer inspection it becomes apparent that the accounts of the battle vary according

to the speaker. In “Deception through Words” Carol McGinnis Kay asserts that with these variations “Kyd makes it clear early on in the play that we can trust the words of no one on stage” (Kay 21). Andrea confirms that he was “slain” in “conflict with Portingale” and proceeds to give details of his passage through the underworld but neglects to give any additional information of how his death occurred (I. i. 15-8). The Senecan prologue includes all the Classical references to Roman gods and myth one might expect but does not include the contextual details of prior events that tragic convention dictates. The audience are left unsure as to why Andrea is seeking revenge, or in fact, whether he is at all, for Andrea makes no mention of revenge. It is the personification of Revenge who identifies Don Balthazar as “the author of [Andrea’s] death” and portends the narrative of vengeance (I. i. 87).

Additional information on the battle is given by the General in the following scene, but it does not necessarily correspond with Andrea’s prologue and contains elements of rhetorical embellishments that indicate an aggrandising bias to the audience, that should not necessarily be trusted (“Both cheerly sounding trumpets, drums, and fifes, / Both raising dreadful clamours to the sky, / That valleys, hills, and rivers made rebound, / And heaven itself was frighted with the sound”) (I. ii. 28-31). The General identifies Balthazar as Andrea’s killer and Horatio as Balthazar’s capturer, both facts crucial to the plot and strangely omitted by Andrea, but the audience are left in relative uncertainty. The General is asked by the King to “[…] unfold in brief discourse / Your form of battle […]” (I. ii. 16-17). The King signposts to the audience that this is the General’s “form” or interpretation, of the events preceding the play, and in doing so hints that the rhetorical accounts of characters in *The Spanish Tragedy* offer “probable not absolute truths” (Rebhorn 7-8). William West suggests that Elizabethan drama “almost obsessively” revisits “problems of recognition and understanding, repeatedly dramatizing various kinds of confusion” and identifies Kyd as one of the authors in the 1580s and 1590s who “revaluated and revalued confusion” in theatre (West 217; 19). The role of language in *The Spanish Tragedy* becomes increasingly fragmented, functioning as a tool of the deceivers and appearing to abandon those seeking justice. The characters of *The Spanish Tragedy* desperately try to communicate with one another but are rarely understood, leading to a world of confusion and “sundry languages” (IV. iv. 73).

Speech is also central to the plot of *The Spanish Tragedy.* Horatio's "pleasing words" to Bel-Imperia initially inflames Balthazar's murderous jealousy, and Hieronimo spends the rest of the action trying to articulate his plight, lament his death, and appeal the injustice of his murder (II. i. 124). As we have discussed, Hieronimo's role within the Spanish court is reliant on language and Kyd makes it clear that Hieronimo is commended for his communication skills in the first Act. When we first meet Hieronimo, he defends Horatio's right to the ransom of Balthazar ("My tongue should plead for young Horatio's right") and he is listened to by the King ("Content thee, Marshal, thou shalt have no wrong; / And for thy sake, thy son shall want no right") (I. ii. 169; 174). This speech is the first instance of Hieronimo referring to his tongue, he uses the word six times in total, but as the play progresses we see his confidence in its allegiance diminish. Hieronimo's skill for language is consistently demonstrated in the first act via his roles as advocate, playwright and poet and his faith in its value is demonstrated in the immediate aftermath of Horatio's murder.

> Hieronimo's speech upon finding Horatio's body is a series of apostrophes which signal Hieronimo's secure place in Tudor rhetorical tradition, even under the stress of terrible grief. And, despite the deafening silence […] Hieronimo persistently clings to traditional forms of human communication (IV. i. 61; 68-9; Luckyj 87).

However, Hieronimo's confidence is soon shaken by the devastating power of language when exploited by those who wish to deceive. McGinnis Kay argues that one of the major themes of *The Spanish Tragedy* is "deception through words" and notes the relative prevalence of the words "speak" and "tell" in comparison with "vengeance" and "revenge" (Kay 20-21).

This type of verbal propensity for deception is demonstrated in the first scene of the third act, which represents a detour from the main action, as we hear Villuppo mislead the Viceroy of Portingale into believing that Alexandro has killed his son, Balthazar. One nobleman expresses his surprise at Alexandro's murderous intentions:

> I had not thought that Alexandro's heart
> Had been envenomed with such extreme hate;
> But now I see that words have several works,
> And there's no credit in the countenance (III. i. 15-18).

This scene appears to serve the purpose of introducing one of the major themes of the play: the spoken word is not necessarily representative of the truth, for speech can be coaxed and cajoled into presenting the most convenient state of affairs for the speaker. This may seem an obvious point, but it presents something quite interesting in terms of theatricality. As we know, plays consist (almost) entirely of dialogue and if a character's speech is not representative of their understanding or intent, then one must ask the question, what is? The audience are aware that Villuppo is lying about Alexandro's involvement in Balthazar's death, but when Villuppo refers to Alexandro as his "enemy" his reasons are concealed from the audience and, similarly, Alexandro speaks of the "heavens" being the only ones privy to his "secret thoughts" (III. i. 45; I. iv. 94).

When the truth becomes apparent, the Viceroy and Alexandro demand that Villuppo give his reasons and speak his mind (in a scene which foregrounds the treatment of Hieronimo by the Spanish King in the final act) but Villuppo's response is somewhat vague and implausible: "[…] not for Alexandro's injuries, / But for reward, and hope to be preferred / Thus I have shamelessly hazarded his life" (III. i. 94-6). The Oxford edition of the play glosses "preferred" as "promoted", but this seems like drastic action for Villuppo to take in the hope of securing favour in the Portuguese court, particularly as he couldn't be certain whether Balthazar was really dead, and his plot could be so easily foiled. It would appear that the function of this scene is to demonstrate the relationship between words and truth, and the ability of those skilled in words to deceive. Villuppo is not asked to produce any proof before Alexandro is put to death, but he tells a good tale to the Viceroy, who feels instinctively that Balthazar has been killed and whose "ear is ready to receive ill news" (I. iii. 56). The Viceroy asks Villuppo to "tell [his] tale at large" and Villuppo obliges with a rhetorical speech which begins "Then hear that truth which these mine eyes have seen" (I. iii. 59). In the scenes involving the Portuguese court, the power lies firmly with those who are given the opportunity to tell their story. Alexandro is not allowed to speak in his defence because the power of Villuppo's tale has already taken hold and the Viceroy confirms that it is the words of Villuppo that have sufficient impact to secure Alexandro's death:

> VICEROY: No more Villuppo; thou hast said enough,
> And with thy words thou slayest our wounded thoughts.
> No longer shall I dally with the world,

Procrastinating Alexandro's death (III. i. 25-8).

Contemporary changes in the law led to an increasing understanding of speech in the public imagination as a dangerous and potentially criminal act. Henry VIII's 1534 statute expanded the definition of treason from an act against the body of the monarch to include disparaging words as a "treasonous act against his or her dignity" (Lemon 5). Elizabeth's government later "expanded the form and type of words considered treason" in 1571 to include "writing, printing, preaching [and] speech" (Lemon 9-10). Executions "followed a ritual that was essentially similar throughout western Europe, constituting a kind of theater that mixed political and religious elements expressing […] a complex message for spectators to decode" (Ruff 103). On the scaffold "the condemned was offered the right to utter a few last words. Ideally this might be an edifying statement censuring the crimes that led to execution […] Such a death, however, did not always occur despite the best efforts of the clergy attending the condemned person. Occasionally uncooperative individuals ended their days shouting their innocence or defiance, but many executions did not fail crowd expectations of an edifying event" (Ruff 104). It is Pedringano's defiant and ineffectual use of words that secures his own death at the gallows. In "The Theater and the Scaffold" Molly Smith touches upon the importance of the last words afforded to the convict before he was hanged:

> The speech delivered on the scaffold by the victim provided an especially suitable opportunity for […] manipulation; intended to reinforce the power of justice, it frequently questioned rather than emphasized legal efficacy. Chamberlain, for example, bemoans the custom of allowing the condemned to address the audience and cautions about the inherent danger of this practice (Smith 226-7).

The power of this final speech derives from the position of the convict with nothing left to lose, and so is, in effect, free to speak the truth more than ever before. Smith interprets the gallows as a quasi-theatrical scene, a tableau of the punished (convict), the punisher (the monarch and/or state) and the witnesses (the spectators).

The Reformation had a significant and ongoing impact on the function of the public execution in the period, as the focus shifted from the exclusion and punishment of the condemned, to the repentance and forgiveness of a sinner. Katherine Royer suggests that the dying speech became the Dying Speech, the "centrepiece of this new exemplary

strategy", for "what had once been a ceremony centred on severing the condemned from both the civic and spiritual community became in the sixteenth century a ritual focussed on the reformation of his soul [where] in essence, he could be born again in death" (Royer 65; 63). As the Reformation gathered pace in the sixteenth century, with the popularity of the *ars moriendi* and changing attitudes toward penance, the tone of public execution narratives shifted from enacting God's justice and fair punishment, to reconciling the condemned with God before death (Royer 65). Consequently, the nature of the prisoner's final words began to carry greater significance, for if "treason could now be the product of words alone, then words spoken on the scaffold came to be of great importance", whether that be with the aim of forgiveness, or in rare cases, a last-minute reprieve (Royer 68-9).

Assuming the vast majority of those put to public execution were ordinary civilians, the opportunity to speak on the scaffold was likely the most influential one of their lives, and these are the, rather tragic, circumstances parodied in Pedringano's death in *The Spanish Tragedy*. Believing he has demonstrated loyalty to Lorenzo, Pedringano confidently awaits the promised reprieve for his involvement in the death of Serberine, which the audience know will not come. During the execution scene Pedringano is repeatedly encouraged to make the correct type of speech at the gallows and repent his sins ("confess thy folly and repent thy fault"; "methinks you should rather harken to your soul's health") but Pedringano, with misplaced confidence of his pardon, refuses to comply and instead seeks to engage the hangman in derisive word games ("I take it that that is good for / The body is likewise good for the soul; and it may be, in that box / Is balm for both") (III. vi. 26; 76-9). While the audience may have been expected to interpret Pedringano's behaviour as that of a morally-bankrupt mercenary, having betrayed Bel-Imperia and murdered Serberine, I would argue that the pitiful comedy of his final scene elicits some sympathy for his position. Having been entirely deceived by Lorenzo's promise, Pedringano wastes his most important opportunity; instead of using his platform at the gallows to confess, repent, plead his case, or condemn the duplicity of Lorenzo, he engages in futile arrogances and ridicules his final opportunity to speak. Pedringano's untimely death represents not only the betrayal of Lorenzo, but also one enacted by his own words, simultaneously highlighting the power of Lorenzo's deceiving speech and the analogous power of Pedringano's words to unwittingly seal his fate.

Pedringano's predicament may incite more pity than condemnation from the audience for we witness Lorenzo threaten and manipulate Pedringano into his service, desiring his knowledge of useful information. Lorenzo insists that Pedringano betray Bel-Imperia's confidence and reveal what he knows, bidding him speak multiple times in succession ("Tell truth and have me for thy lasting friend"; "Speak man, and gain both friendship and reward"; "speak the truth and I will guerdon thee") (II. i. 55; 62; 72). Lorenzo presents Pedringano's ability to speak what he knows as a redeeming and liberating opportunity that will save him from Lorenzo's wrath, but from past experience, Pedringano knows that being in a position to relay knowledge can also be a dangerous one. Pedringano originally attempts to evade Lorenzo's questions and to speak as little as possible, but Lorenzo's threats against his life force him to reveal the object of Bel-imperia's affections as Horatio. Lorenzo finally convinces Pedringano to speak with the line: "fear shall force what friendship cannot win. / Thy death shall bury what thy life conceals" (II. i. 68-9). This is an interesting interpretation of Pedringano as messenger; to Lorenzo he is merely a vessel of information, of spoken and unspoken words, and if he will not reveal those words, then he shall be put to death in order to prevent him either "leaking" this information to other parties or using it to cultivate the relationship between Bel-Imperia and Horatio. Once Lorenzo has obtained the required information, he states with confidence that "where words prevail not, violence prevails" (II. i. 108).

We see this interpretation used to greater manipulative effect in *Titus Andronicus.* When Lucius threatens to kill Aaron's child, Aaron responds with a promise that if Lucius saves the child, he will tell him "wondrous things" (V. i. 55). The Aaron of the bible acted as Moses' intermediary and translator and was reported to have a "persuasive tongue" and we can see how Shakespeare's character comes to embody contemporary understanding of the "dark art" of rhetoric in his desire to manipulate through beguiling speech (Oakley-Brown 339). We see how Aaron's eloquence under pressure secures him power in his exchange with his captor:

> AARON: Lucius, save the child,
> And bear it from me to the empress.
> If thou do this, I'll show thee wondrous things
> That highly may advantage thee to hear.
> If thou wilt not, befall what may befall,
> I'll speak no more but "Vengeance rot you all!"

LUCIUS: Say on, and if it please me what you speak'st,
Thy child shall live and I will see it nourished.

AARON: And if it please thee? Why, I assure thee, Lucius
Twill vex thy soul to hear what I shall speak:
For I must talk of murders, rapes and massacres,
Acts of black night, abominable deeds,
Complots of treasons, mischiefs, villanies,
Ruthful to hear yet piteously performed
And this shall all be buried in my death
Unless thou swear to me my child shall live.

LUCIUS: Tell on thy mind, I swear thy child shall live (V. i. 53-69).

It is interesting that Aaron promises to *show* Lucius these "wondrous things", that might advantage him to *hear*. The power of Aaron's words is underlined here, in their ability to generate a compelling image, to summon up a presence, an immediacy, which will be impossible to resist. With much talk of "speaking", "saying", "telling" and "hearing" in this exchange, Aaron uses the power of his words on the scaffold to great effect; whetting Lucius' appetite with the intrigue of these "wondrous things" that may "advantage" him to hear, he uses this opportunity to characterize himself as indispensable to Lucius' cause. We see the control Aaron wields in this scene, threatening to "speak no more" and to "bury" the unspoken information with him. Rather like Lorenzo's interpretation of Pedringano, Aaron paints himself as a vessel containing unknowable yet inestimable words that will go unsaid should Lucius not agree to his terms. Perhaps building on Kyd's portrayal of the hapless would-be villain in *The Spanish Tragedy,* Shakespeare demonstrates that Aaron understands his role as secret-keeper and exploits this to his advantage. Aaron draws comparisons between his account and the child whose life is at stake; both are representative of Aaron's "legacy", and if one should die, so must the other. He promises a kind of seduction, a beguiling performance, in exchange for his child's life and Aaron's description of the account he will reveal not only mirrors the previous events of the plot, but also bears a striking resemblance to tragedy as art form: "twill vex thy soul to hear […] complots of treasons, mischiefs, vallanies […] Ruthful to hear yet piteously performed" (V. i. 66).

As the scene unfolds and Aaron's words become more violent and distressing, the audience is left wondering whether Lucius made the right decision in allowing him to speak. For all Aaron's talk of advantage, much of Aaron's speech is a hedonistic list of

his various crimes and deceits, the information regarding his involvement in Titus' misfortune and Lavinia's fate is new to Lucius, but oddly, does not expedite the plot. Lavinia has by this stage already communicated the necessary information to Titus and their revenge plan is in motion. Lucius does not see or speak to Titus until the closing scenes - so why does he grant Aaron's request in exchange for information? It appears that intrigue got the better of Lucius, and though it may "vex his soul" he cannot help but listen. Again, this bears semblance to the language of tragedy and accentuates the enormous power afforded to those that are skilled in delivery. The more Aaron reveals, the more horrifying the details become and the more joy he appears to take in telling them. Lucius eventually asks, "Art thou not sorry for these heinous deeds?" and Aaron responds, "that I had not done a thousand more" (V. i. 123-4).

> AARON: If there be devils, would I were a devil,
> To live and burn in everlasting fire,
> So I might have your company in hell
> But to torment you with my bitter tongue.
>
> LUCIUS: Sirs, stop his mouth and let him speak no more (V. i. 147-51).

Once Aaron has gleefully "tormented" him with his words, Lucius eventually realises the power he is surrendering by granting him liberty to speak and silences him with a gag. Aaron remains gagged on stage for the rest of the scene and acts as a visual clue to the power of words. When Aaron returns, it is for the final few lines of the play and Lucius sentences him to a slow and painful death: "Set him breast-deep in the earth and famish him; / There let him stand and rave and cry for food / If anyone relieves or pities him, / For the offence he dies" (V. iii. 178-181). This is a curious punishment, for it once again gives Aaron the right to speak, which he so evidently craves ("[…] why should wrath be mute and fury dumb?"); and seemingly rather hypocritically, Lucius condemns to death anyone who should listen and be deceived (V. iii. 183).

Tamora believes she shares Aaron's egocentric command of words and can "enchant the old Andronicus" to her own devices "with words more sweet and yet more dangerous" (IV. iv. 89-91). Rather like some contemporary understandings of rhetoric, Tamora equates her linguistic skill with that of magic, believing she can "smooth and fill his aged ears / With golden promises that, were his heart / Almost impregnable, his old ears deaf / Yet should both ear and heart obey my tongue (IV. iv. 95-99). Tamora

describes the insidious power of her words, able to win over and enact violence on Titus' enfeebled mind despite the reluctance of his body. Interestingly, this assurance in the power of her tongue to instigate violence echoes the lies she told about Lavinia and Bassianus. When her sons come upon her in the woods, she seeks to silence Lavinia and Bassianus who have threatened to tell of her affair with Aaron. However, it appears that she goes beyond what is necessary to incriminate the couple, telling a strange tale in which Lavinia and Bassianus sought to lure her into the forest alone:

> They told me here at dead time of the night
> A thousand fiends, a thousand hissing snakes
> Ten thousand swelling toads, as many urchins,
> Would make such fearful and confused cries
> As any mortal body hearing it
> Should straight fall mad, or else die suddenly (II. ii. 99-104).

Here Tamora gives a fictitious but potent description of a kind of "death by listening" in the "ruthless, deaf and dull" forest described by Aaron (II. i. 627). Anxieties concerning the sinister enchantment of words are reinforced and we see the dynamic between the power of the speaker and weakness of the listener emphasised in this scene. When the brothers begin to drag Lavinia deeper into the forest, Tamora abandons her to her fate, entreating her sons only to ensure her silence. Lavinia pleads with Tamora to "hear […] but a word" but she refuses, insisting "I will not hear her speak; away with her!" (II. ii. 137-8). Tamora understands the danger of listening and does not wish to be persuaded by Lavinia's pleas. Lavinia begs Tamora "be not obdurate, open thy deaf ears" but eventually is silenced by Chiron when he puts his hand over her mouth and says, in words echoed directly, but presumably unknowingly, by Titus in the final act: "I'll stop your mouth" (II. ii. 160; 184).

Persuasion is consistently presented as the principal power of the villainous in *Titus Andronicus* and Titus attempts to address this in his capture of Chiron and Demetrius. He asks for them to be bound, in an attempt to preclude any possibility of escape, but crucially, he also requires them to be gagged. In this sense, Titus observes their ability to speak as equally dangerous as their physical ability to overpower their captors:

> TITUS: […] bind them sure,

> And stop their mouths if they begin to cry. *Exit.*
>
> CHIRON: Villains, forbear! We are the empress' sons!
>
> PUBLIUS: And therefore do we what we are commanded.
> *[They bind and gag them.]*
> Stop close their mouths; let them not speak a word.
> Is he sure bound? Look that you bind them fast (V. ii. 160-5).

Titus repeats his request for them to be gagged when he re-enters with Lavinia. He requires that they not speak but listen to his "fateful words":

> Come, come, Lavinia, look, thy foes are bound.
> Sirs, stop their mouths; let them not speak to me,
> But let them hear what fateful words I utter.
> […] What would you say if I should let you speak? (V. ii. 166-8; 178).

Titus ponders what words they might utter should they have the privilege of speech and this resonates with the previous scene in which Lucius allowed Aaron's eloquence to secure the sparing of his life, and to poison all who listened with his hateful words. Titus wishes Lavinia to see her attackers with all their power removed and at this point in the action, this is clearly as much about what they might say as what they might do. In the style of *maius nefas*, he enforces their silence as they enforced Lavinia's and proceeds to exacerbate their misery by relaying his gruesome plans in detail to a mute audience, incapable of protestation.

Troubled speech

While the power of speech is repeatedly afforded to those who seek to manipulate the world to their own advantage, the language of the aggrieved in *Titus Andronicus* and *The Spanish Tragedy* becomes increasingly isolated, and characters that once relied on their socially-sanctioned, communicative roles in court find themselves symbolically (and potentially literally) inaudible. When Titus pleads for the lives of his sons, his words are made a mockery as there is no one to hear them:

> TITUS: […] and let me say, that never wept before,
> My tears are now prevailing orators.
>
> LUCIUS: O noble father, you lament in vain:
> The tribunes hear you not, no man is by,

and you recount your sorrows to a stone (III. i. 25-9).

Depending on how this scene is staged, the spectacle of no one listening to Titus could work in several ways, it could be made symbolic of his fall from grace in the Roman court, or indicative of his growing descent into madness; or, assuming the tribunes were present at the start of Titus' lament but absent by the end, it could indicate that Titus' words no longer have the power that he supposes. Titus' expectation that his social rank demands he be heard is called into question and, despite the emperor having promised never to forget Titus' "unspeakable deserts" on his return from the wars, we see that he is becoming increasingly imperceptible to wider Roman society (I. i. 260).[27]

Similarly, in *The Spanish Tragedy,* the voices of the aggrieved are frequently restrained and controlled, Villuppo prevents Alexandro from denying the charges against him in the Portuguese court at the start of the play and this is mirrored in Lorenzo's efforts to prevent Hieronimo from speaking to the King about Horatio's murder. Hieronimo is physically kept away and branded "lunatic" by Lorenzo. It is clear that the King is able to hear Hieronimo's words, asking "who is that? Hieronimo?", but he seemingly does not understand their meaning (III. xii. 64). Hieronimo refers plainly to Horatio's "deadly wounds" and declares that he will be "avenged":

> Away, Lorenzo, hinder me no more;
> For thou hast made me bankrupt of my bliss.
> Give me my son! You shall not ransom him!
> Away! I'll rip the bowels of the earth
> And ferry over to th'Elysian plains,
> And bring my son to show his deadly wounds.
> Stand from about me!
> I'll make a pickaxe of my poniard,
> And here surrender up my marshalship:
> For I'll go marshal up the fiends in hell
> To be avenged on you for all of this (III. xii. 68-77).

However, the King responds as though he hasn't understood ("what means this outrage?") and Lorenzo is easily able to convince him that Hieronimo's outburst was

[27] Interestingly, Derek Dunne remarks that silence has been ominously present from the opening scenes of *Titus Andronicus*. The play opens with rhetorical orations from the two candidates vying to become emperor of Rome, but Shakespeare makes no mention of the crowd's responses to Saturninus and Bassianus' election speeches and so it must be presumed that they speak to a silent auditorium, foregrounding the tropes of miscommunication and figurative deafness (Dunne 59).

financially motivated; brought about by a desire for Horatio's share of Balthazar's ransom (III. xii. 79). Lorenzo uses individual words spoken by Hieronimo, such as "bankrupt", "ransom", and earlier, "redeem", to manipulate the King's understanding. Hieronimo throws his words at the King, but their cumulative meaning is fragmented, and they are interpreted as merely "fury". This is interesting in relation to the discussion of actors "parts" as outlined by Palfrey and Stern, who suggest that performances of this period were "in many ways an accumulation, or a meeting, of numerous separate parts" (Palfrey and Stern 6). In this scene the characters react as though Hieronimo occupies a different "play world", uttering his words into a vacuum, rather than participating in a dialogue, and we see how contemporary theatrical practice may have been inferred in this scene, and used to illustrate questions and anxieties surrounding the function of speech in isolation, when exchange is impossible and justice is unattainable (Palfrey and Stern 9).

This breakdown of communication is accentuated at the close of the play when Hieronimo summarises his actions and motives in English for his audience to understand: "Here break we off our sundry languages, / And thus conclude I in our vulgar tongue" (IV. iv. 73-4). The scene illustrates a familiar instigator of revenge, namely "authority's deafness to a subject's complaint" and presents it as literal deafness (Rist "Introduction" 10). Hieronimo delivers a speech (a total of eighty lines) explaining his revenge to the court and ends with "and, gentles, thus I end my play, / Urge no more words, I have no more to say" (IV. iv. 150-1). Yet, his audience still fail to understand him:

> KING: Speak, traitor! Damned, bloody murderer, speak!
> For now I have thee, I will make thee speak.
> Why hast thou done this undeserving deed?
>
> VICEROY: Why hast thou murdered my Balthazar?
>
> CASTILE: Why hast thou butchered both my children thus?
>
> HIERONIMO: O, good words!
> As dear to me was my Horatio
> As your, or yours, or yours, my lord, to you.
> My guiltless son was by Lorenzo slain,
> And by Lorenzo and that Balthazar
> Am I at last revenged thoroughly,
> Upon whose souls may heaven yet be avenged
> With greater far than these afflictions (IV. iv. 163-75).

The King, Viceroy and Castile all express their lack of understanding in succession, and this makes for a clamour of confusion aimed at Hieronimo regarding his motives. We, in the audience, are clear about his desire to avenge his son and punish his killers for their actions, yet despite Hieronimo's explanation, the other characters on stage are angered by what they interpret to be a lack of clarity and demand he speak. What are we to make of this? Perhaps Hieronimo's speech was mistaken for a part of his play? Perhaps, as the immediate family members of those Hieronimo has slain, they are too grief-stricken to process Hieronimo's explanation? These may be possibilities but given the precedent of this in Act III scene xii with Hieronimo's petitioning of the King, I would suggest that this is another example of Hieronimo's increasing inability to communicate with the other characters on stage. In response to their questioning, Hieronimo tries again to explain, exclaiming: "O, good words! / As dear to me as was my Horatio". This is a crucial line; Hieronimo is not only mourning his only son but is also grieving for his words, for his ability to express himself which has been taken from him throughout the course of the play. Hieronimo has successfully revealed the "mystery" of his intent in these earlier scenes but we see his ability to convey meaning disintegrates after the murder of Horatio. Ultimately, language becomes devoid of virtue in *The Spanish Tragedy*; its ideals of "civilizing" exchange are abandoned and it becomes symbolic of manipulation and deceit.

Harmless silence

Having looked at the power of speech and how persuasive rhetoric and borrowed language are overlapped and intertwined in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus*, I would like to close the analysis with a consideration of how both plays consider silence, particularly in their final scenes and closing statements. Silence does not often figure in the Senecan tradition: suffering in Seneca, as discussed in the previous chapter, is conventionally a very verbal affair, with victims more likely to launch into oration than be lost for words. However, in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus*, "silence speaks volumes", frequently figured as a symbol of sterility and impotence, illustrative of the characters' dwindling influence on the plot and on their surroundings (Dunne 59). However, at points in both texts, silence occupies an ambiguous space, appearing to alternatively, and sometimes simultaneously, signify oppression and strength. In "Titus Andronicus and the Violence of Tragedy", Paul Innes considers the role of absence in

Titus Andronicus, suggesting that "the meanings generated by absence" in the play "are at least as potent as its violent onstage mutilations" (Innes 37). And Derek Dunne suggests that "quite apart from the "violent silencing of blabbing tongues" there is a "deeper impetus towards silence" in *Titus,* and at certain points, a "pervasive silence that threatens to overwhelm many of the key characters" (Dunne 61). Dunne specifically highlights the tribunes scene at the start of the third act, where Titus "recount[s] his sorrows to a stone" (III. i. 29). The tribunes are mute in the face of Titus' lamentations, and merely "*pass by him*"; this stage direction would evoke a powerful visual metaphor on stage, evocative of the gulf between Titus and those in authority, and symbolic of the tyranny of the "pervasive silence". This is similarly true of Hieronimo "knocking at the gates of Pluto's court", as he stands at the entrance of the palace, where his pleas to the Spanish King fall on deaf ears (III. xiii. 110). The importance of absence and omission of language in *Titus* and *The Spanish Tragedy* cannot be overstated; speechlessness is both the cause, and the result of, tragic vengeance, and by the closing scenes, it is the absence of speech, and its legal, social, and psychological consequences, which threatens to resonate down the generations.

By Act III Hieronimo is beginning to recognise the limitations of language in life's extremities ("my thoughts no tongue can tell") and understand that he must control his grief by modifying his words (in a sense, divorcing them from reality, in order to manipulate his rapidly changing circumstances to his advantage):

> No, no, Hieronimo, thou must enjoin
> Thine eyes to observation, and thy tongue
> To milder speeches than thy spirit affords,
> Thy heart to patience, and thy hands to rest (III. ii. 67; III. xiii. 39-41).

The entry of the Senex (Bazulto), later in the third act of *The Spanish Tragedy,* demonstrates the contrast between speech and silence. The Viceroy points out that "complaining makes […] grief seem less" but Bazulto, who arrives to petition Hieronimo to help discover the murderer of his son, is unable to verbalise his distress:

> OLD MAN No, sir, could my woes
> Give way unto my most distressful words
> Then should I not in paper, as you see,
> With ink bewray what blood began in me (I. iii. 32; III. xiii. 74-77).

Scott McMillin suggests that the Old Man occupies a special position within the plot as a "figure of silence" in a play "rife with language" (McMillin "The Figure of Silence" 27). Hieronimo refers to him as the "silly man so mute" and addresses him as "father" (III. xiii. 68-69). While the address of "father" likely refers to Bazulto's age, the connection between the two men is clearly drawn: Hieronimo has inherited Bazulto's circumstance and will himself soon become the "silly man so mute". Indeed, after reading Bazulto's supplication Hieronimo struggles to differentiate between them:

> No, sir, it was my murdered son:
> Oh my son, my son, O my son Horatio!
> But mine, or thine, Bazulto, be content.
> Here, take my handkercher and wipe thine eyes,
> Whiles wretched I, in thy mishaps may see
> The lively portrait of my dying self (III. xiiii. 80-5).

Hieronimo identifies with both Bazulto as a "portrait" of his "dying self", but also with his murdered son. Hieronimo subsequently takes out Horatio's handkerchief, a relational object he considers a type of channel between them ("a token 'twixt thy soul and me") (III. xiii. 88).

As Hieronimo begins to abandon words, justice and self-expression his understanding of self becomes increasingly fluid as he plays multiple parts, casting himself as the grieving father, the unavenged son and the classical hero "knocking at the gates of Pluto's court" (III. xiii. 110). MacMillan notes that during Hieronimo's speeches "the Old Man is virtually silent, unable to connect the past to the present through speech"; his experiences cannot be processed or contextualised through language and consequently he appears outside his own narrative, as a continual present, or "lively image" upon which Hieronimo projects his woes (McMillin "The Figure of Silence" 27). Bazulto believes that words cannot express his "blood", or "passion" as it is glossed in the Oxford World Classics edition and confirms that he cannot speak his case or "bewray" his feelings in writing (Maus 345). The OED defines bewray as "to expose (a person), by divulging his secrets", "to expose (a deception)" or "to reveal, divulge, disclose, declare, make known, show" ("Bewray, V."). Here it seems that Bazulto refers to words being a poor substitute for emotion, but with the use of "bewray" which has strong associations of betrayal and deception, he adds another dimension to the statement. Bazulto no longer trusts his own words and fears they may betray his meaning. Jennifer Flaherty argues

that this is a running theme throughout the play where “language is portrayed as inherently deceptive, betraying even the speaker. Speech is a confusing liability or dangerously misleading rather than a source of power and agency” (Flaherty 89). We see Bazulto’s experiences nudge Hieronimo closer to this understanding of language; where he once believed that “sound[ing] the burden” of his loss would ease the pain, he comes to recognise that only action will suffice where words have lost their meaning (III. xiii. 119). Hieronimo tears up the citizens’ petitions for justice exclaiming that “not one drop of blood” falls from them; he recognises that their words will come to nothing, for where the connective narrative of justice is “exiled from the earth” only the action of revenge exists in isolation (III. xiii. 129; 139).

The mirroring of Hieronimo’s loss of heirs and his loss of expression is particularly apparent in this scene. Bazulto is also a father without a son, excluded and silenced, “the silly man so mute”, that has lost all significance. The imagery surrounding Bazulto is similar to that surrounding Antonio in *The Revenger’s Tragedy,* with emphasis placed on age and sterility. Tom McAlindon argues that fruitfulness and sterility are two of the “dominant image clusters” of the play (McAlindon 73). From the point at which Horatio is found hanging from the tree in the family bower (itself symbolic of distorted fertility), sterility is foregrounded in the play in the loss of language and stunted progress (McAlindon 73). Hieronimo can no longer assist in pleading the cases of the citizens, or his own, and sees himself reflected in the aged, silent man with “mournful eyes and hands to heaven upreared” (III. xiii. 68). Hieronimo describes the Old Man’s futile attempts to shape language for his purposes: “[…] thy mutt’ring lips / Murmur sad words abruptly broken off / By force of windy sighs thy spirit breathes” and we see the contrast of Hieronimo’s ineffectual speeches with Bazulto’s sparse syllables (III. xiii. 164-66). Seeing himself in Bazulto, Hieronimo concludes that language has failed him and Isabella in their hour of need and rather than “complaint” making her “grief seem less”, Isabella’s eyes are now “dimmed with overlong laments” (III. xiii. 136). Eventually Hieronimo decides that the three of them will forego speech for a song:

> And thou, and I, and she will sing a song,
> Three parts in one, but all of discords framed –
> Talk not of chords, but let us now be gone;
> For with a cord Horatio was slain (III. xiii. 170-3).

The interlude-style song features more contemplation of what it is to speak and to be heard. *The Oxford Anthology of Tudor Drama* glosses "all of discords framed" as "made up of disharmonies", painting a picture of all three grieved parents, Hieronimo, Isabella and Bazulto walking together, singing the same tune but at different times and rhythms, a visual metaphor for their shared experiences and discordant expressions (Walker *The Oxford Anthology of Tudor Drama* 617). Kyd uses the words "discords" "chords" and "cord" in succession, as Hieronimo contemplates the phonetic sounds of words versus their meaning. Hieronimo uses the word "chord" to represent the vocalisation of grief, and "discord" to describe the chaotic lack of clarity in this auditory outpouring, then drifts slightly on to the similar sounding word "cord" and its separate meaning relating to the method of Horatio's murder. It seems the role of Bazulto is to demonstrate the disintegration of structured and reciprocal language in the world Hieronimo now inhabits, where words have become inadequate, inconsequential and potentially damaging.

Somewhat ironically, Hieronimo chooses to employ language to enact his revenge, using his talent for "fruitless poetry" to produce a play, and his skills in communication to persuade Lorenzo, Balthazar and Bel-Imperia to be his players (IV. i. 69). Bel-Imperia, of course, is aware of Hieronimo's plans but Lorenzo and Balthazar are swayed by his flattery:

> HIERONIMO Why, this is well. I tell you, lordings,
> It was determined to have been acted
> By gentlemen and scholars too,
> Such as could tell what to speak.
>
> BALTHAZAR And now,
> It shall be played by princes and courtiers,
> Such as can tell how to speak – (IV. i. 96-101).

The almost identical phrases "Such as could tell what to speak" and "Such as could tell how to speak" appear in succession here, and underline the importance of speech, in its various modes. Hieronimo flatters them by implying that they are learned enough to understand his poetry, and Balthazar expands on this by adding that they would also know how to deliver it. This crucial rhetorical element is underlined by Balthazar and the audience are reminded of the power of speech, as spoken by those who know how to

deliver. Hieronimo then makes a strange appeal, and requests that “each one of us must act his part / In unknown languages, / That it may breed the more variety” (IV. i. 166-68):

> BALTHAZAR But this will be a mere confusion
> and hardly shall we all be understood.
>
> HIERONIMO It must be so; for the conclusion
> Shall prove the invention and all was good;
> And I myself in an oration,
> And with a strange and wondrous show besides,
> That I will have there behind a curtain,
> Assure yourself shall make the matter known (IV. i. 174-181).

In an apparent caricature of the theatre of “parts”, Hieronimo wishes to bamboozle his audience with characters appearing to speak independently, either unheard, unheeded or misunderstood by those around them, and in so doing create a metaphor for what his life has become. In a nod to the audience, Hieronimo points out that while the spectators my find it “passing strange” it will doubtless be “plausible to that assembly” (IV. i. 81-2). William West suggests that Hieronimo believes confusion will aid his revenge for “in the ruin of meaning, action may take place unimpeded” (West 228). Hieronimo confirms that all will become clear at the close of the play, where he plans to deliver an “oration” that will “make the matter known”; but as we see, once Hieronimo gains his captive audience, his words of explanation go unheard and meaning appears to be permanently altered.

Hieronimo’s words of explanation in the final act are afforded an enormous amount of significance by the other characters on stage, rather like the last words of the convict at the gallows (“Speak, traitor! damned, bloody murd'rer, speak! / For now I have thee, I will make thee speak”), but Hieronimo eventually surrenders his long-desired opportunity to speak; abandoning his attempts to be understood, he resolves to remain silent: “What lesser liberty can kings afford / Than harmless silence? Then afford it me” (IV. iv. 163-4; IV. iv. 180-1). This is (understandably) not accepted by the King who vows to make Hieronimo “tell” (IV. iv. 183). This is an interesting demand, for the play does not suggest there is anything left for Hieronimo to tell. He has completed his revenge and explained his motives and as far as the audience are concerned, this should conclude the action. However, Hieronimo then affirms the King’s suspicion that there is more information to be uncovered “[…] never shalt thou force me to reveal, / The thing which I

have vowed inviolate" (IV. iv. 187-8). Richard Preiss considers this strange turn of events in *Early Modern Theatricality:*

> There is no 'thing which I have vowed inviolate'; Hieronimo is the first, and perhaps the only, dramatic character to ever keep a secret from himself, his being so tightly coiled around it that he could not impart it even if he wished. Its efficacy, though, lies not in any punitive answer: the real secret is the secret itself, why Hieronimo *thinks* he has one (Preiss 66).

Preiss goes on to suggest that Hieronimo's secret was likely a device of Kyd's to ensure repeat custom at the theatre. However, it is possible that the irony of this scene is that silence is what Hieronimo has eventually come to regard as "inviolate". Hieronimo's trust in rhetoric from the start of the play is clear, yet as we have discussed, his methods of communication falter and eventually fail him. Christina Luckyj argues that Hieronimo originally "imagines himself struggling against the impotence of silence to gain the power of speech" but that the end of the play "reflects a culture obsessed with the silence that lies on the other side of discourse" (Luckyj *A Moving Rhetoricke* 87-88). As we have discussed, the power of speech, and particularly the influence of rhetoric, was a prominent concern in the period. Wayne Rebhorn confirms that the practice of rhetoric replaced that of dialectic in the early modern period to become the "queen of the liberal arts" (Rebhorn 1). But *The Spanish Tragedy* is a play that demonstrates what happens when the "ceremony" of language fails, showing that "the effort to summon eloquence toward the ideal of justice comes to nothing [and] the words have "no way" (McMillin "The Figure of Silence" 42). Throughout *The Spanish Tragedy,* words seem to abandon the just. Deceivers such as Lorenzo and Villuppo use words to their advantage, but their use in the defence of justice evaporates, and Hieronimo eventually embraces silence.

In *Titus Andronicus* however, silence is symbolic of impotence, a type of mini-death, and a thing forced upon one's enemies. Where Hieronimo volunteers silence in protest, the Andronici rally against it to reinstate their place within the historical narrative. Jennifer Flaherty compares the role of the mutilated tongue in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus* and concludes that while "Hieronimo's self-mutilation is a bold act of resistance, and the destruction of the tongue is a source of empowerment rather than suffering, Shakespeare, by contrast, presents the tongue as a powerful member; the loss of speech and language is a loss of agency and control" (Flaherty 89). While I agree that

silence in *The Spanish Tragedy* is presented as a preferable alternative to the deceptive powers of speech, I think there is more to unpack in Shakespeare's depiction of the loss of speech in the final act. Titus does, after all, choose to permanently silence Lavinia, and arguably himself, if we are to assume that he knew he would be put to death for the murder of Tamora. There seems to be a sense that language within an individual can become tainted through violence, and consequently dangerous and counterproductive.

As we have discussed, Titus, like Hieronimo, choses to surrender his laments and formal expectations of speech because he believes they are hindering him in avenging the wrongs done to him. Yet, immediately after the bloody actions of the final scene, Marcus and Lucius make attempts at rhetoric and begin to editorialise their sorrows into a cautionary tale and defer the fate of Rome to the "common voice" of the people (V. iii. 139). The Roman lord looks to Marcus for his interpretations of events "Speak, Rome's dear friend" and Marcus replies:

> My heart is not compact of flint nor steel
> Nor can I utter all our bitter grief,
> But floods of tears will drown my oratory
> And break my utterance even in the time
> When it should move ye to attend me most,
> And force you to commiseration.
> Here's Rome's young captain: let him tell the tale,
> While I stand by and weep to hear him speak (V. iii. 79; 87-94).

Marcus and Lucius share the task of retelling the tale of Titus' woes to Rome's authorities. This is interesting for, as with Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy,* the audience have no need of hearing the details again, but in accordance with revenge tragedy convention, the tale must be told, and in the case of *Titus,* potentially reconfigured, as a whole. Hieronimo finishes his tale himself, then cuts out his tongue to ensure that no further words are spoken, and in a sense, the contamination of the tale stops with him. We can up to a point believe he has succeeded in this for the King and the Viceroy close the scene by asking "what age hath ever heard such monstrous deeds?" and concluding that the hereditary line of Spain stops with the death of Castile, in a metaphor that also alludes to Hieronimo's "story" (IV. iv. 202). The King decries "I am the next, the nearest, last of all", all "succeeding hope" has been extinguished, and the Portuguese viceroy vows to mourn his son, the "only hope of our successive line" and abandon the alliance between them; in this sense, there is no future for either nation (IV. iv. 203; III. i. 14). Hieronimo

dramatically calls an end to contaminated speech, and the retelling of his tale (there is a certain irony to this considering *The Spanish Tragedy* was probably the most frequently produced and adapted text of the period). Yet *Titus Andronicus* appears to consider the contamination of language to die with the speaker and offers a potentially more hopeful message, namely that tragedy can be adapted and retold in a positive light to serve as a cautionary tale in the "common voice" of the people.

Marcus addresses the people and asks them to judge their retelling: "Now have you heard the truth, what say you Romans? […] Speak, Romans, speak" (V. iii. 127; 134). The Romans support the Andronici and it is confirmed that Lucius and Marcus have narrated well. Lucius and his son (also named Lucius) represent the future of Rome in this final scene, as the direct generational descendants of Titus and as future governors of Rome. Lucius says to his son at the very close of the play:

> Come hither boy, come and learn of us
> To melt in showers. Thy grandsire loved thee well […]
> Many a story hath he told to thee,
> And bid thee bear his pretty tales in mind
> And talk of them when he was dead and gone (V. iii. 163-5).

Lucius bids his son "learn" how to grieve, but also to gain understanding from his grandfather's story and consider how to retell it in the future to the greater good of the people. Here we observe a familiar paradox of tragedy, and similarly of grief, in how the destruction of the past can give birth to the new (Eagleton 27). Paul Innes suggests that *Titus Andronicus* demonstrates "the logic of tragedy" that "requires the unmaking of the older state to be as excessively violent as possible" for "only then can the new formation take its place" (Innes 34). We see this mirrored in the play's relationship with language; throughout the plot, escalations in the mutilation of the body is doubled in the accelerated distortion of language, where words and lines are increasingly "chopped and changed to fit inappropriate contexts", yet once the characters have exhausted themselves grasping at the remaining shreds of civilizing speech and coherent meaning, all must fall silent before renewed understanding can be forged from the remains (Chaudhuri 787; 802).

Both *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus* reflect a culture fundamentally conflicted about the significance of speech: on the one hand, language embodies a

connection between consciousness and the outside world, and both Hieronimo and Titus grieve for its loss as much as that of their kin, on the other, anxiety over the destructive power of language permeates the action of both plays and villains such as Lorenzo and Aaron exemplify the dangers of rhetoric when exploited to malevolent intent. The closing scenes of *The Spanish Tragedy* present a particularly bleak view of rhetoric, where the "ceremony" of language fails, showing that "the effort to summon eloquence toward the ideal of justice comes to nothing [and] the words have "no way" (McMillin "The Figure of Silence" 42). Hieronimo bites out his tongue, bringing an abrupt end to both his "words" and to the narrative of the play, but while Titus silences himself in his suicide by proxy, the narrative continues, and we hear how his grandson will "bear his pretty tales in mind" and "speak of them when he is dead and gone" (V. iii. 164-5). In *The Spanish Tragedy,* the violence must end with the deaths of Hieronimo and Isabella, for their only son is dead and consequently their narrative is cut short. Lessons cannot be passed on, for the line is unnaturally stopped. In *Titus Andronicus,* in a linguistic parallel of the physical destruction and repurposing of bloody body parts on stage, we see the remaining family attempt to piece together narrative fragments and broken parts to form a comprehensive account for future generations. In the final scenes of *Titus Andronicus,* Lucius vows to remember the legacy of his father, to listen to the "common voice" of the people, and in so doing initiate a dialogue that will "heal Rome's harms" (V. iii. 139; 147). All debts have been settled in the closing scenes of both plays, but only in *Titus Andronicus* are the terms understood by the relevant parties and in this sense, where the *Spanish Tragedy* must end in "harmless silence", *Titus Andronicus* offers language a potential, though perhaps unlikely, reprieve in the mouths of the next generation (IV. iv. 181).

3. Inheriting history and the burden of memory in *Richard III*

Shakespeare's *Richard III* self-consciously inherits, adapts, and incorporates a myriad of narratives, dramatic traditions, and historical accounts in its retelling of the fate of the infamous, medieval tyrant. Although not strictly a revenge play, I have chosen to include Shakespeare's history in my analysis of revenge conventions, for as Dermot Cavanagh observes, the early modern history play contains no "immutable, defining essence" but reflects the "eclecticism of contemporary theatrical practice" (Cavanagh *Language and Politics* 3). It is perhaps best understood, together with sixteenth-century tragedy, as a "mongrel genre, compounded of multiple traditions" (Bushnell "Classical and Medieval Roots" 289). *Richard III* interacts with genre, heritage, and source material in a way that makes it a natural point of continuation in my exploration of inheritance in the revenge tradition. It also provides some interesting insights into how inherited histories were absorbed into the legacy of theatrical narratives. In *The Drama of Memory in Shakespeare's History Plays,* Isabel Karreman argues that the horrors of the civil wars of the fifteenth century had to be modified and in a sense forgotten, "for [a united] English nation to emerge" (Karremann 16). Karreman confirms that the Tudor retelling of the Wars of the Roses was a familiar, and influential narrative in the period:

> The Tudor myth which functioned as a founding fiction of the nation […] was re-enacted again and again in history plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, thus keeping the nation's violent past in view at the same time as it was overwritten by the myth of unity […] (Karremann 16).

This sense of collective remembrance and collective forgetting seems strikingly similar to the conclusion of *Richard III*, and of many of the revenge plays in this study, where violence and trauma must be assimilated into the broader narrative in order to surmount the cyclical pattern of revenge.

Although the balance Richard seeks to redress is not a crime committed against him by another individual (as we might have come to expect in the revenge narrative), he rallies against a universe that has wronged him in a similar fashion to Thyestes, Hieronimo, or Titus, and eventually comes to purge his polluted environment by

revenging himself upon himself ("Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself?") (V. iii. 180). Unlike the revenge protagonists we have discussed so far, Richard has no one to avenge but himself. He seeks retribution not for the death of a loved one, but for the loss of who he might have been. He seeks redress not for the heirs he has lost, but for the alternate legacy he might have left, revenging himself on the Yorkist reign, on his mother, his brothers, his allies, and eventually on himself. In a sense, Thyestes, Hieronimo, and Titus all employ a form of self-revenge and self-punishment, in their pursuit of justice and the restoration of balance; Thyestes begs the gods to be punished, and both Hieronimo and Titus take steps to end their own lives. *Richard III* explores this idea further, its Machiavellian protagonist struggling to hold on to a coherent sense of self through the internal conflict of revenge, ambition, and conscience.

Shakespeare's blend of history and tragedy centres on ideas of inheritance and legacy, both in its immediate relationship to its antecedents and in its thematic preoccupation with succession, heritage, and inherited guilt. This hybridity is most apparent in the complex characterisation of Richard, who, as I shall argue, gradually reveals himself to be an elusive and volatile composite of expectations,[28] in both his inherited roles and responsibilities, but also in his enthusiastic embodiment of others' presumptions and apprehensions. Richard "wilfully embraces" this inherited identity, this "master-form", his character as reported and recounted by those around him, and he adopts and abandons identities with untroubled glee until he realises his actions have consequences, and a debt has accumulated (Holbrook 118). In *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time*, David Scott Kastan talks about the "closure" of Macbeth. Isolated and confined by the accumulation of his own actions, Macbeth "sees his freedom of movement increasingly limited until he realizes that he has almost no freedom at all" (Kastan 100). I argue that a similar type of disillusionment happens in *Richard III*. Richard both exploits, and seeks revenge on, the circumstances he has inherited and finds freedom and autonomy in a world of disguise and manipulation, but ultimately, loses his sense of self. As his surrounding allies disperse and his options for projection become limited, he turns inward for revenge. I will divide my analysis into three areas that

[28] I use the term "composite" to mean both "[m]ade up of various parts or elements […]" and an "[…] aggregation of individuals, or of distinct parts" to reflect the diverse components that make up Richard's character ("Composite, Adj. And N.").

demonstrate the significance of inheritance in the play, the crucial role it plays in Richard's character development, how it serves the purposes of the plot, and how it contributes to the themes of dramatic inheritance I have explored in the wider thesis.

I open with a discussion of how inheritance and birth are ingrained within the narrative of *Richard III*, including how the antecedents of the text and Richard's predecessors (dramatic and historical) interact with Shakespeare's telling. I shall discuss the play's thematic contrasts of birth right and bastardy, inheritance and sterility, and the mythology surrounding Richard's gestation. Richard decries his reputation and preconceptions about his nature but throughout most of the narrative uses these, sometimes conflicting, characterisations and rumours to his advantage. However, towards the end of the play we catch a glimpse behind this façade to an empty space, an echo chamber of the words of others, and we come to understand that Richard consists of impersonations, interpretations, and mythology. His past, the varied interpretations of his past, and his self-narration eventually make up his character whole. Any indication of a 'true' character is pointedly elusive, and, I shall argue, deliberately so. For most of the plot, Richard embodies the phobic stereotypes of both his contemporaries and the audience, revelling in his infamy and enacting his revenge on those around him, but his dramatic loss of self in the final scenes underlines the consequences and significance of such inherited and internalised mythology.

The second section of the analysis, 'Inheriting the past', shall look at how Richard's inheritance and succession has been scarred by the violence of the wars, resulting in a fractured "natural order". The language surrounding Richard repeatedly figures him as a usurper, and he is consequently positioned in conflict with "natural" inheritance (characterised by Richmond), but the play casts doubt on whether these distinctions can be clearly drawn. Rather than anchoring their dynasty and legitimising their reign, the House of York's bloody history of war looms over the action of the play, emphasising instability and inconsistency. At several points, Richard urgently drives the action forward to try and escape his past, or alternatively, attempts to rewrite it altogether, using these newly constructed narratives and various guises to manipulate those around him. The idea that one's future is inherited, predetermined and "sealed in [..] nativity", is treated with ambivalence, at once embraced and rejected by Richard (I. iii. 226). In displacing the princes on the throne, Richard seeks to seize the crown from the ruins of the war,

and overturn his brother's right of primogeniture, and establish his own bastardised dynasty. The quasi-historical setting of England's royal court should represent the ultimate in socially and legally endorsed hierarchical inheritance, the irony of course being that it is merely a totem for the precariousness of rule. Yet even in this brutalised hierarchy, Richard is positioned conclusively outside of the space. Richard views the royal court from an outsider's perspective and watches resentfully as others usurp positions he feels they are unworthy of. His attempts to "restore" what he believes to be his "right of birth" through violence and excess, are similar in tone to the revenge protagonists that have gone before him (III. vii. 127). What is also similar, is Richard's desire for redress takes a very particular form. Richard's repays his enemies in kind by employing his infamous notoriety to conquer the society that has rejected him, overcoming his reputation by alternatively reinforcing and disproving perceptions, enlisting support from the unlikeliest of allies, while keeping everyone at a distance.

Lastly, I will consider how ghosts and living memories are merged and overlapped as aural and visual reminders of history; employed as personifications of conscience, inherited guilt, and the inescapability of the past. Margaret acts as a precursor to the ghosts: her physical presence on the peripheries of the court provides a perpetual reminder of the crimes that have brought Richard to the throne, and her speech largely consists of recollections and remembrances that will later be repeated in the condemnations of those Richard has murdered, and the "thousand several tongues" of conscience (V. iii. 192). Building on the theme of Richard as composite, I consider how Richard's famous attack of conscience represents a culmination of these motifs, when he comes to fear himself, when all the contrasting and competing versions of the past come from myriad voices, but "every tale condemns [him] for a villain" (V. iii. 196).

This chapter shall explore how inheritance is central to the plot of *Richard III,* in a way that blends the revenge tragedy tradition and the chronicles and histories that preceded it and demonstrate how all the various threads converge to create this intriguingly composite character, made up of history, rumour, and preconception. Through this analysis, I show how Richard ultimately cannot bear the weight of his own chaotic, disjointed heritage, and must self-destruct to usher in the age of "smooth-faced peace" (V. v. 3).

Inheritance and birth

The notion of "inheritance" is a pertinent theme in the sources, style, and content of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. The antecedents for Shakespeare's play are varied, preceded by Thomas More's *History of King Richard III* (1513), Edward Hall's *The Two Illustre families of Lancastre and York* (1548), Thomas Sackville's *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1559), Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587), and if not in published form, potentially manuscript versions of *Richardus Tertius* (1579) by Thomas Legge and *The True Tragedie of Richard the third* (1594).[29] [30] Shakespeare's Richard also indicates theatrical precedents in Senecan tragedy, the medieval *De Casibus* and morality play traditions, and the revenge tragedy motifs discussed in previous chapters. Consequently, this Richard emerges from his "winter of […] discontent" carrying the weight of many traditions and representations that preceded him, including of course, his portrayal in the other plays in Shakespeare's tetralogy: Henry VI parts 2-3, and a Tudor audience's inevitable preconceptions (I. i. 1). In this sense, Richard enters the stage already weighed down by his past and by history, he is burdened with the expectations of the surrounding characters, and those of the audience. As Harold Brooks observes, Richard has parallels with Seneca's Atreus, with More's depiction, with medieval Vice, and also with the contemporaneous Machiavels in Thomas Kyd's Lorenzo in *The Spanish Tragedy,* and Christopher Marlowe's Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* (Brooks 736). This dramatic inheritance and theatricality is pointedly self-conscious and woven into the narrative, into Richard's composite character, and we see Richard employ a multitude of performative selves to engender his designs on the crown, with Anne, with Edward, with Elizabeth, and even with his "other self" Buckingham (II. ii. 151).

Metatheatre and performativity are well known conventions of revenge drama, but unlike Atreus, Hieronimo, Titus, or Hamlet, Richard does not engender a spectacle to "catch the conscience[s]" of his adversaries: he himself is the performance (*Ham.* II. ii. 607). John Jowett observes that unlike the other plays of the tetralogy, or indeed, any

[29] All dates are approximate.
[30] In *The Queen's Men and Their Plays,* Scott MacMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean argue that Shakespeare may have "begun his career" performing with The Queen's Men, meaning that could potentially have acted in manuscript-only plays such as *The True Tragedie of Richard the third* (MacMillin and MacLean 160).

other of Shakespeare's major plays, *Richard III* opens with the protagonist directly addressing the audience (Jowett 27). The opening monologue and summary of prior events would likely have reminded audiences of ghost-prologues in Seneca and neoclassicism, but Richard's invitation into his inner world has exaggerated self-conscious theatricality and we are encouraged to note the contrast between Richard's dialogue with the other characters and his asides to the audience ("Dive, thoughts, down to my soul: here Clarence comes") (I. i. 30; 40-1). Like Don Andrea in *The Spanish Tragedy*, Richard bemoans the injustices against him ("Cheated of feature by dissembling nature") and appeals for a type of retribution from the upcoming events in the play, but crucially, Richard is to be no spectator: he sets himself apart as gleefully avenging himself on "dissembling nature" by manipulating the play world towards his will, and our sympathies are suspended rather than secured (I. i. 19). Richard's allusions to a collective history quickly turn to self-interested plots and motives. The opening lines are communal and punctuated with disdainful and sarcastic references to "our", most notably present at the start of three consecutive lines: "Our bruised arms hung up for monuments, / Our stern alarums turned to merry meetings / Our dreadful marches to delightful measures" (I. i. 6-8). This is quickly followed with a flurry of narcissistic "I" lines, beginning with Richard musing on his own reflection ("But I that am not shaped for sportive tricks / Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass") and continuing along this vein: ("I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion", "Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace / Have no delight to pass away the time") and concluding in self-analysis: ("I am determined to prove a villain", "As I am subtle, false and treacherous") (I. i. 14-15; 18; 24; 30; 37). Jowett argues that "Richard's immediate sociality in relation to the audience reflects his isolation within the play. What marks him out as separate from the world identifies him as special to us" (Jowett 28). I would agree that this intimacy/distancing dynamic forms part of the audience's fascination with Richard, but I would also suggest that it demonstrates the fragmented selfhood that will become critical to both Richard's initial success and his eventual downfall.

In his essay "Unhistorical amplifications" Harold Brooks argues that *Richard III* is key in demonstrating a progression on the English stage, from the bloodthirsty, classical drama emulated in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus* to a more thoughtful, complex, and playful style (Brooks 734-5). Shakespeare borrows many themes from

Seneca including the curse of the royal house, revenge ghosts, and the *maius nefas* motif discussed in previous chapters. Richard's crimes begin as calculated and well-orchestrated schemes but quickly escalate into greater, more sudden and precipitous acts that lose him the support of his key confidantes. Brooks argues that Richard "resembles Atreus the Senecan tyrant, Thyestes the murderous hypocrite, and, in his intellectual force and absence of moral feeling, […] Medea" but he also observes that Richard contains some of the theatricality and comedic charm of medieval English theatre (Brooks 734-5). Words such as "villain", "entertain" and even the repetition of "these days" underline Richard's theatricality and act as distancing techniques in this opening speech, persuading the audience to treat the action unfolding on stage as a game, and ultimately winning them over to his perspective. In "The Cultural Work of Early Modern Drama" Greg Walker confirms that this was a familiar pattern in medieval theatre, where audiences were expected to share the Vice's viewpoint, to "delight in their boisterous and irreverent antics" that seek to "co-opt[..] spectators into their schemes […]"(Walker "The Cultural Work of Early Drama" 89). Yet, as in the medieval theatre where audiences become increasingly estranged from the Vice, as the play progresses we see Richard's gleeful tricks subside, and his nefarious exhibitionism diminish, as he transforms from devious outsider to brutal tyrant (Walker "The Cultural Work of Early Drama" 89). Where we might have initially been deceived into thinking Richard's asides represented his 'true self', a special insight for the audience, it is gradually revealed to be just another guise, another aspect of his performativity, an adaptation, mutable and changeable as the rest.

Richard's volatility and inconstancy are reflective of the political instability of the play. The speed with which the crown changes hands in the tetralogy undermines the authority and integrity of primogeniture and royal rule, placing emphasis on its arbitrary nature. Such instability characterises both the time in which the play is set, and the time in which the play was written and performed, with each period carrying connotations of swiftly changing allegiances and disengagement with a troublesome and problematic past.[31] As we have previously discussed, partly as a result of the ever-changing expectations of the Reformation, England's relationship with its past was becoming

[31] For more on how changing jurisdictions and religious practices constituted a break from the past, see Jonathan Baldo, *Memory in Shakespeare's histories: stages of forgetting in early modern England* (2012), and Isabel Karremann, *The Drama of Memory in Shakespeare's History Plays* (2015).

increasingly fractured at the turn of the sixteenth century and Hastings' "tottering state" and Catesby's "reeling world" are undoubtedly descriptions that would have resonated with playgoers (III. ii. 35; 40).

Fertile parallels can be drawn between the play's interest in heritage and genealogy and concerns surrounding a disputed crown and new, unchartered territory. In *Shakespeare's Unreformed Fictions*, Gillian Wood's describes the adjustment required after the Reformation as an effective rewriting of the past, where "the nation's stories about itself had to be retold in order to cope with the major redraft of the Reformation" (Woods 23). Social understandings of memory, history and tradition had become extremely conflicted by the time *Richard III* was staged, and its re-telling of an approximate quasi-history, one adapted for purpose, reflects these interpretations of the time. Woods highlights the ideological problem of acknowledging a version of the past that had retrospectively become problematic in early modern England and explains how the newly created "Protestant nation state" struggled to incorporate its "Catholic heritage into its sense of self" (Woods 26). It has been suggested that this sense of detachment from the recent past is most evident in the history play, where there is a greater sense of the narrative being part of a greater whole (Baldo 2). *Richard III* demonstrates how the past cannot be erased from the present, and the consequences of such a schism. At the conclusion of the play, Richmond (the future Henry VII and the start of the Tudor reign) talks repeatedly of union, of "conjunction" and "conjoin[ing]" "each royal house", and in doing so, underlines the legitimacy of the Tudor foundations by demonstrating their incorporation and mitigation of past grievances (V. v. 20; 31; 30). The slate cannot be wiped clean for Richard for he is a product of his own history, mythology and antecedents. His composite character is made up of the expectations and apprehensions of those around him, and of the audience. The influence of his past, his historicity and his mythology, is inescapably embedded into his present and by the final scenes of the play, he can neither control it nor outrun it. Richard's self-destruction demonstrates the importance of understanding and incorporating the past to ensure the stability of the future.

Richard's birth and development are a constant source of speculation in the play; several characters equate his formative disabilities with his malevolent character and Richard himself has an ambivalent relationship with these interpretations. Linda Charnes

points out that in early modern religious thought, Richard's physical deformity and "unnatural" pace would not only have been understood as reflective of his corrupted character, but also an "imminent warning […] of divine judgement and political disaster" (Charnes 345). In this sense, Richard symbolises the inheritance of a corrupted line, a divine judgement sent to purge the court of transgression. Charnes goes on to suggest that "a curved back" was considered a sign of a "downwardly mobile" moral religious, and social trajectory, and I would add that it is also symbolic of Richard as a dead-end (Charnes 347). Richard represents the end of the line for the Plantagenets, and his physical deformities reinforce this understanding. Richard's dialogue bemoans these social disadvantages, but his actions revel in the fears inflamed by these superstitions:

> But I, that am not shap'd for sportive tricks,
> Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;
> I, that am rudely stamp'd, and want love's majesty
> To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
> I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,
> Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
> Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time
> Into this breathing world, scarce half made up (I. i. 14-21).

Richard describes having been "cut short" of his full self, "curtail'd of this fair proportion" and "cheated of feature by dissembling nature". Richard's most likely definition of "dissembling" here is "to pass over, neglect, ignore", but we must also acknowledge the potential subtext of to "alter or disguise the semblance of (one's character, a feeling, design, or action) so as to conceal, or deceive as to, its real nature" ("Dissemble, V.1"). Richard laments the irony that nature has with one hand positioned him so close to the throne and with the other ensured that he will always be adjacent, passed over, and neglected. Richard's railing against nature contains a strong element of the untimely and problematic inheritance I raised earlier, he considers himself a project abandoned, rudely incomplete and "sent before [his] time / Into this breathing world, scarce half made up".

This imagery of being sent into the "breathing world scarce half made up" is illustrative of Richard's birth, he believes he was ejected from the womb prematurely, unadorned with the necessary aesthetic finesse to thrive. He considers himself misused by nature, but Richard acknowledges that it is this sense of deficiency and imperfection that has driven him (and perhaps enabled him) to conceal his malevolent intent and to deceive all those around him: to "seem a saint when most [he] plays the devil" (I. i. 338).

Richard attempts to be "his own parent and his own author" in his descriptions of himself in these early scenes, foreshadowing his calculated reshaping of the succession (Garber 35; Packard 108). This contrasting of "overgestation [and] belatedness" emphasises the influence of rumour surrounding Richard's character (Connolly). He is presented as slow ("so long a-growing and so leisurely") and hurried ("sent before [his] time"), and he is rumoured by those around him to have been both unnaturally stagnant ("wretched'st thing") and unnaturally rapid in his development ("they say my uncle grew so fast / that he could gnaw a crust at two hours old") (II. iv. 19; I. i. 20; II. iv. 18; II. iv. 27-8). In various ways Richard's development is singled out as notable, abnormal and crucially, prophetic, but these scenes in particular underline the contradictory and inconsistent nature of these stories. They quite simply cannot both be true, and yet Richard appears to internalise and utilise both claims equally, prefiguring later scenes of his undoing.

While Richard's physicality is used as an ever-present emblem of corruptibility and predetermination, those aspects of Richard that occur offstage are the subject of much speculation. We see how his mother, the Duchess of York, appears surprised at the extent of the rumours surrounding his birth:

YORK Marry, they say my uncle grew so fast
That he could gnaw a crust at two hours old.
'Twas full two years ere I could get a tooth.
Grannam this would have been a biting jest.
DUCHESS I pray thee, pretty York, who told thee so?
YORK Grannam, his nurse.
DUCHESS His nurse? Why she was dead ere thou wert born.
YORK If it were not she, I cannot tell who told me.
ELIZABETH A parlous boy: go to, you are too shrewd (II. iv. 27-35).

The rumour implied in this scene has somehow influenced the young prince, who believes it was Richard's nurse that had told him but is corrected by his grandmother that it must have come from another source. The Duchess' amendment that the nurse was dead before the child was born and York's ambiguous response that he "cannot tell" who informed him of the circumstances around Richard's birth creates a certain mystery around the accounts and their origin. York's curiosity about the myth and the Duchess' questioning of its source reminds us that the play is not only concerned with the origins of characters but also the genesis of the stories and myths surrounding them. In the second play of the tetralogy, 3 *Henry VI,* King Henry is stabbed by Richard while speaking

about the mythology surrounding his birth, calling him an “indigested and deformed lump” that had teeth before he was born, and Margaret later refers to Richard in the same vein, as “[t]hat dog, that had his teeth before his eyes” (*3 Henry VI.* V. vi. 51-3; IV. iv. 46). We see further evidence of Richard’s conflicting character in this, for public curiosity surrounding the oddities of his birth appear to provoke him and yet it is precisely these fanciful, discordant opinions that Richard relies upon to gain his advantage. When York asks about the rumours, his mother describes him as a “parlous boy” and “too shrewd”, both descriptions referring to the dangerous and potentially malignant inferences behind the boy’s curiosity about his uncle. The boy’s quote attributed to his uncle’s defence of his stunted development (“small herbs have grace, great weeds grow apace”) contradicts Richard’s private speech in the opening soliloquy in which he refers to himself as “cheated of feature” (II. iv. 13; I. i. 21). But are we to consider this private speech? Again, we see how Richard’s asides are yet another performance. Directed at the audience, Richard’s interpretation of his childhood here is, once again, adapted for a particular audience and for a particular purpose.

Inheritance often overlaps with predeterminism and portents in *Richard III*, the mythology surrounding Richard’s “fluid origin story” often places him outside of the natural and true line of development and the other characters frequently regret their failure to comprehend what they perceive to have been divine portents in Richard’s early years (Packard 114). Margaret the prophetess considers Richard’s fate to have been “seal'd in [his] nativity” and believes his future was marked out in his defiance of “natural” development. Pregnancy and determinism are returned to time and time again in the play, with frequent foregrounding of the words “birth” and “womb”, linguistically emphasising the text’s concerns with succession and inheritance. It is interesting to note that the word “birth” is generally used in its hereditary sense, usually referring to the succession and to one’s “birth right”, whereas “womb” is often used more darkly and usually with an element of blame. The uses of “birth” are typically figurative and detached, whereas the uses of “womb” are often more gruesome and macabre. In this sense, birth represents the “lineal glory of [the] royal house”, whereas the womb is the “nest of spicery” that breeds despair (III. vii. 114; IV. iv. 344). The womb is repeatedly represented as a chamber from which suffering is released, the Duchess refers to her womb as “accursed”, a “bed of death” in which a “cockatrice” is “hatch’d to the world” and Margaret reinforces this imagery:

> From forth the kennel of thy womb has crept
> A hell-hound that doth hunt us all to death.
> […] That foul defacer of God's handiwork
> Thy womb let loose to chase us to our graves (IV. i. 48-51; IV. iv. 44-9).

We have seen this symbolism of the womb in previous chapters. The mystical and dangerous "nest of spicery" is a common post-Reformation allusion, and the womb's capacity to both cause and bring forth suffering is bound up with understandings of the curse of Eve. Elements of myth and legend are equally clear in these descriptions, Richard is described as a "cockatrice"; a mythical serpent with the head of a cockerel that could kill with a glance, and a "hell-hound", a Cerberus-like creature from Classical mythology ("Cockatrice, N."). The Duchess has "released" a beast with infinite ability to cause suffering. We see this relationship between The Duchess and Richard in Anne's curse on Richard's issue:

> If ever he have child, abortive be it,
> Prodigious, and untimely brought to light,
> Whose ugly and unnatural aspect
> May fright the hopeful mother at the view (I. ii. 20-3).

Anne intends to condemn Richard's future in her words, but the audience also recognise the story of his past, brought into the world "scarce half made up", "ugly and unnatural" and later, the description of a mother with regrets, who should have heeded such portents and "strangl[ed]" the child in her "accursed" womb (I. i. 21; I. ii. 22; IV. iv. 131-2). Women are repeatedly given the role of arbitrators in the play, and frequently surmised to have been ineffective in those roles. Fathers are illustrative of births and bloodlines and mothers are the keepers of wombs and fate.

Margaret describes Richard as both a "slander" of his mother's womb, and the "loathed issue of thy father's loins!" (I. iii. 228-9). In her discussion of legitimacy and sovereignty, Kate Pritchard describes Shakespeare's portrayal of Richard as quasi-illegitimate, as embodying all the stereotypes of bastardy while in reality, his lineage remains unquestioned (Pritchard 85). Margaret highlights this in her description:

> Thou elvish-mark'd, abortive, rooting hog!
> Thou that wast seal'd in thy nativity
> The slave of nature and the son of hell!
> Thou slander of thy mother's heavy womb!
> Thou loathed issue of thy father's loins! (I. iii. 225-29).

Richard is accused of being a “slander”, a “false or malicious statement”, of his mother’s womb, while simultaneously the “loathed issue of his father’s loins” ("Slander, N."). There is a fundamental disconnect in these two statements and yet to those around him, Richard embodies both at once. We see these types of binaries revisited in the play at several points; Richard is both childlike and cunning, quick yet slow, legitimate and illegitimate. Margaret denounces Richard as “elvish-mark’d”, “abortive” and a “slave of nature and the son of hell” (I. iii. 225-7). He is presented as illegitimate in another way too, as a usurper in his mother’s womb, a cuckoo planted there by infernal forces and the label of “usurper” follows Richard throughout the play and foregrounds his later actions. In only the second scene, Richard plays the usurper of Edward of Westminster’s wife, of his brother’s throne and he goes on to usurp the sovereignty of Clarence and the princes. Perhaps it is this element of his past that Richard is unable to discard once he has enacted his revenge and achieved the power he desires. Pritchard argues that “[b]ecause Richard usurps his kingdom, he cannot make it his own: instead he apes the structure of legitimate society; he is a counterfeit (‘illegitimate’) version of a true reign” (Pritchard 88). In seizing the crown by deceit, Richard disrupts the natural order of things, the kingdom becomes a shadow of its former glory and Richard becomes a caricature of a ruling monarch.

This inauthenticity is underlined in the scene where Richard feigns disinterest in the crown in the hope of securing it. Buckingham insists to Richard that the crown is “[…] successively from blood to blood / Your right of birth, your empery, your own” and Richard’s response surreptitiously describes to Buckingham the inevitability of his inheriting the kingdom, while simulating modesty:

> First if all obstacles were cut away,
> And that my path were even to the crown,
> As my ripe revenue and due by birth
> Yet so much is my poverty of spirit,
> So mighty and so many my defects,
> As I had rather hide me from my greatness,
> Being a bark to brook no mighty sea,
> Than in my greatness covet to be hid,
> And in the vapour of my glory smother'd (III. vii. 126-7; 137-45).

Richard describes how he had hoped his “defects” would hide him from his “greatness” and “glory”, when we know that it is precisely this that he has capitalised on in order to

secure the crown. The artificiality of this scene underlines how Richard dramatizes and "performs" his inheritance, both in his physical disabilities and character flaws, to achieve the results he desires. Buckingham underlines the duty that accompanies Richard's birth:

> Then know, it is your fault that you resign
> The supreme seat, the throne majestical,
> The scepter'd office of your ancestors,
> The lineal glory of your royal house,
> To the corruption of a blemish'd stock (III. vii. 112-115).

By using aggrandising terminology such as the "supreme seat", the "throne majestical" and the "scepter'd office of your ancestors" Buckingham emphasises the strong element of inherited suitability for the role of King and the "natural" blood line that Richard is a part of. Buckingham confirms that he has heeded Richard's instructions in publicly implying the bastardy of Edward's children and plays to his audience by stressing the dire consequences of the crown falling to a "blemished stock". He underlines Richard's taking of the centre stage; he is no longer to be surplus to requirements but to "take the sovereignty thereof / Not as Protector, steward, substitute / Or lowly factor of another's gain / But as successively from blood to blood / Your right of birth" (III. vii. 123-6). Buckingham alludes to Richard's overwhelming sense of having been relegated and confirms that he should now triumph over the "blemished stock". However, for the audience perhaps "blemished stock" has a double meaning, reminiscent not only of illegitimacy but of the child who should have been strangled in his mother's womb (IV. iv. 131-2).

Inheriting the past

The second part of the analysis will address how the "reproductive futurism" we see invested in heirs and inherited succession in earlier revenge tragedy is approached differently via Richard's bastardised dynasty in *Richard III*. I shall go on to discuss how Richard's usurping of natural succession sparks a distortion of Richard's previously masterful control of natural time and stage time. Where Gloucester once carefully stage-managed every move, performing his various roles with aplomb, King Richard starts and stumbles his way through the remaining scenes, demanding sudden and hasty action in a bid to secure his position, desperate to erase the brutal and chaotic past that placed him on the throne, and begin a new, untarnished succession.

Richard is of course, not alone in seeking a new and unspoiled royal line. The preceding plays document successive monarchs all searching for the stability of an ordered succession amongst the chaos of war. As we have previously discussed, contemporary perceptions of the patrilineal monarchy understood heirs and natural inheritance to "represent the unity of "temporal and natural processes" and "the primary means of honouring the past and guaranteeing the future" (Bailey 221). Anxieties surrounding the security of the crown are reflected in the many and varied motifs of inheritance and disinheritance, and the responsibility of safeguarding the crown for future generations looms large over the action. Upon hearing of the death of the princes, Elizabeth bewails her children as "unblow'd flowers", gone too soon (IV. iv. 10). In this sense, the princes are symbols of inheritance: they are only what they will become, an extension of their parents' position and a stable royal line. In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive,* Lee Edelman's analysis of the symbolism of the child in literature and in societal imaginings is similar to Elizabeth's description. For Edelman the child represents an ideal, an investment in the future, embodying "the telos of the social order" while also representing "the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust" (Edelman 11). We see this interpretation of progeny repeated at various points in *Richard III* and it is interesting to consider Richard's position in this context. At the start of the action, Richard is an uncle, not a father, a brother not a husband, "Lord Protector" but not King; in this sense, the collective desire for the "natural state of affairs" places Richard firmly outside of the action. As Buckingham puts it: "Protector, steward, substitute […] lowly factor for another's gain" (III. vii. 124-5). In the legal and biological world of patriarchalism, inheritance and "reproductive futurism", Richard is fundamentally surplus to requirements (Edelman 202). Although, according to historical record, Richard and Anne did have a son, significantly, Shakespeare writes this out of the play and chooses to keep Richard perpetually on the side-lines (Packard 128).

Previous narratives of revenge have focused on lineage as construction of self, and on children as representatives of the future, yet Richard has no parental grievance to repair and no children to avenge. Richard's injustice is his lack of opportunity, his lack of legacy; placed too far from the throne, he is excluded from the significance and status he craves. Richard is consumed with bitterness over being displaced and marginalised

by his brother's marriage and children; he holds Elizabeth's (and consequently the princes') lineage in contempt:

> […] the world has grown so bad
> That wrens make prey where eagles dare not perch.
> Since every Jack became a gentleman
> There's many a gentle person made a jack (I. iii. 70-3).

Richard despairs to see his status as "eagle" supplanted by inferior "wrens" and resents what he perceives to be his brother's dilution of their royal blood. Yet despite his disdain for this new royal blood, he uses this malleability to his advantage. After witnessing the kingdom seized in battle, and the crown repeatedly misplaced, Richard concludes that the future is pliable, no longer dictated by God or by birth right, but adapted and shaped by those who make an impact, by those skilled in persuasion, by those willing to shed blood. Believing he can shed his inferior position and the legacy of blood he carries with him from Tewskesbury, Richard plans to carve out his own future and avenge himself in the process. Richard flouts his inherited place within primogeniture, because he considers it unjust and insignificant in the face of war. Once Richard has usurped his brother(s)' inherited succession and destroyed their familial and sovereign unit, he seeks to piece together his own "bastardised" dynasty from the remains (Packard 128). However, once Richard becomes King his revenge mission is over; he is no longer the brooding outsider but now King, and his path is uncertain. Once Richard is thrust out of the wings and into the spotlight, his control begins to wane, and his increasing desperation is significant for the audience, for they know that Richard is simply a deviation in the true line of succession embodied in Richmond. For the audience, Richard symbolises the end of a corrupted line, a "long-usurped royalty", and his conspicuous lack of natural heirs emphasises this understanding of Richard as a metaphorical dead-end (V. V. 4).

The bastardy and illegitimacy of Richard's character is underlined in his relationship with time; never quite belonging anywhere, he is figuratively and physically represented on the fringes, entering to interrupt ongoing conversations, and disrupt the world around him in various guises. Richard was famously interrupted from birth and sent into the world "scarce half made up" (I. 1. 21). Richard's actions on stage are almost exclusively illustrative of interruption and disturbance, he interjects into the Yorkist line in

his marriage to Anne, disrupts the order that would have saved Clarence's life, and usurps the line of succession through the murder of the princes. Through this, the understanding of Richard as a deviation from inheritance, linearity, and the "true-derived course" of history is reinforced. The positioning of Richard as somewhat removed from his proper time and place is mirrored in his, mostly solitary, entrances, where he frequently appears suddenly to disrupt an ongoing conversation between the other characters; a position he regularly uses to his advantage.

We see Richard frequently disrupting potentially progressive conversations and manipulating them to his own ends. At the start of Act II, we are introduced to King Edward, who proclaims he has "done a good day's work" in diffusing the tension between the rival factions within the court and encouraging them to "purge" their hearts of "grudging hate" (II. i. 1; 9). His efforts are successful and the peace-making concludes with an embrace, potentially ominous for the audience who would note the stark tonal contrast to the previous scene with the murder of Clarence. The King remarks upon Richard's absence in this truce and his entrance is prefigured by Buckingham who presently describes Richard as approaching "all in good time" (II. i. 45). Richard returns his sentiment with the acknowledgement that this is a "happy time of day" (II. I 47). When Richard goes on to deliver a lengthy speech confirming his wholehearted adherence to the truce, the Queen asks that it might be henceforth a "holy day" and pleads for Clarence's deliverance. Richard uses this atmosphere of composure to heighten the impact of his words, taking the opportunity to disrupt this tentative harmony with: "Who knows not that the noble Duke is dead?", making use of his adept timing for maximum impact in delivering the terrible news (III. I. 78). He then makes it clear that Edward's reversal of Clarence's death warrant was too late to save him, and that Clarence was killed in the interim:

> But he, poor soul, by your first order died,
> And that a wingéd Mercury did bear.
> Some tardy cripple bore the countermand,
> That came too lag to see him buriéd.
> God grant that some less noble and less loyal,
> Nearer in bloody thoughts, but not in blood,
> Deserve not worse than wretched Clarence did,
> And yet go current from suspicion (II. i. 86-92).

Richard describes Edward's first order as delivered speedily by a "wingéd Mercury" and his second being delayed by its dependence on himself as the "tardy cripple" who "came too lag to see him buried". The speech meditates on the nature of time, using lexical repetitions of haste and delay to foreground the sentiment articulated in *Macbeth*, that "what's done cannot be undone" and emphasising that their "current" situation is unalterable, established and determined by what is past (*M.* V. i. 63-4). Richard describes his timing as unavoidably ineffectual, hampered by his being a "cripple", but the audience know that Richard's timing in the death of Clarence was in fact most proficient, conducive to his intentions as he is the one that goes "current from suspicion". Here we see another example of Richard using his position as outsider to commandeer the action at court, Pritchard describes this type of manipulation as Richard's "bastard voice":

> Richard utilises his bastard voice to create a continuous current of words that undermines his brother's reign by disruption[…] The propaganda that runs as an illegitimate alternative to the truth throughout his usurpation is another incarnation of this voice, as is the soliloquy, where the bastard voice maintains an undercurrent of unnaturalness, an illegitimate alternative to normality (Pritchard 89).

We see how Edward's scene of peace, this "holy day" and time for reparations is both literally and figuratively disrupted by Richard who, (as we have seen before in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus*), provides one of many "illegitimate alternative[s] to the truth" in the revealing of Clarence's death. In casting himself as the "tardy cripple" that arrived too late to save Clarence, he accentuates his place outside of the "natural", while placing the blame at Edward's door for having enlisted his services over that of the "wingéd Mercury" that bore his first command. Ensuring his "alternate truth" is accepted by the other characters, in an act of stage management, Richard diverts attention away from his intentions and on to his physical form, eliciting sympathy and diverting responsibility.

Richard's performativity and his illegitimacy are frequently linked, in his association with counterfeits and forgeries, but also in his physical separation from the other characters. Richard frequently enters alone and narrates his interactions with the other characters in his asides. Operating outside of the narrative, Richard becomes part character, part director, manipulating the action from the side-lines. This mirrors his position in the royal bloodline and within the court, and Richard's playful and easy

construction of scenes serves to highlight the instability of these foundational structures. When discussing Richard's ability to present himself in a variety of guises to the other characters, the audience, and to some extent, to himself, Joel Slotkin argues that Richard "recognizes no essential identity in himself apart from performance" (Slotkin 14). We see this emerge in Richard's staging of the scenes leading up to his coronation and it is made explicit in Act III sc. vii when Buckingham directs Richard on the stage:

> BUCKINGHAM [...] Be not you spoke with but by mighty suit:
> And look you get a prayer-book in your hand,
> And stand betwixt two churchmen, good my lord,
> For on that ground I'll build a holy descant.
> Be not easily won to our request.
> Play the maid's part: still answer nay, and take it.
>
> GLOUCESTER Fear not me. If thou canst plead as well for them
> As I can say nay to thee for myself,
> No doubt we'll bring it to a happy issue (III. vii. 40-8).

Buckingham gives Richard all the instruction he needs to get the Mayor and the citizens on side. He positions Richard between two clergymen and requests that he finds the prayer-book prop to complete the spectacle. The fraudulent nature of Richard's claim to the throne is made explicit in his staging of himself and it is interesting that he responds to Buckingham's, rather crass, instructions to "play the maid's part: still answer nay, and take it" with an extension of the sexual metaphor "no doubt we'll bring it to a happy issue". The issue of Richard's throne is not the royal heirs that one might expect, but precisely this type of disruption and deception. Richard and Buckingham seek to construct a scene of legitimacy, that foregrounds Richard's "ripe revenue and due by birth" and his good conscience and presents him as the saviour of a corrupt and "blemish'd stock" (III. viii. 139; 115). Buckingham uses similar phrasing twice in succession here, describing the illegitimacy of the current line and casting aspersions on Edward and Elizabeth's marriage bed, he pleads with Richard not to abandon the "lineal glory" of the royal house "to the corruption of a blemish'd stock", and asks him to "draw out" the "royal stock / From the corruption of abusing time" (III. vii. 115; 180-1). The two most important elements in Buckingham and Richard's tableaux appear to be hereditary legitimacy and good conscience, both subject to God and both attributes which Richard is markedly deficient in. They paint a picture of the crown being taken from unsuitable, illegitimate hands ("this

Edward whom our manners term the prince") and restored to its rightful heir, which is of course similar to the language of "long-usurped royalty" surrounding Richmond's triumph at the end of the play (III. vii. 172; V. v. 4). Richard's biggest failings are presented as his greatest strengths in this scene, and his performative skill is successful.

One of Richard's most evident manipulations of time and staging occurs in Act I sc. ii when he manages to manipulate Lady Anne in mourning for those whom he has murdered, over the body of her dead father-in-law, and in the immediate aftermath of the death of her husband. Richard marvels at (and revels in) his skill in persuading her of his love at a time of such high intensity, when all her instincts should be against him. While Richard tells Anne modestly that he would wish but to "rest one hour in [her] sweet bosom", he adapts the meaning of this for the audience when he confirms that he "shall not keep her long" (I. ii. 122; 215). Richard and Anne's marriage is largely kept offstage until we hear of Richard's plan to dispose of her, when he coldly requests Catesby to "rumour it abroad" that Anne "is sick and like to die" (IV. ii. 50-1). It is strongly implied that this is a lie intended to explain Anne's imminent death and Richard's remarriage. Richard effectively kills Anne offstage with these words and she returns as a ghost in the final scene to curse Richard and to invert his earlier statement with confirmation that she "never slept a quiet hour" with her husband (V. iii. 159). The seduction, marriage and dispatch of Anne are all notable for their suddenness, and both statements from the wooing scene and the cursing scene, mirror one another; Richard wished to "rest an hour" with Anne, but Anne "never slept a quiet hour" with Richard, and both perceive their union in terms of hours, emphasising its brevity. It is interesting to consider the function of Anne's character in the play since while he married her to help him to a "secret close intent", Richard's marriage to her does not appear to gain him any political advantage, and both their marriage and her subsequent death take place offstage (I. i. 157). Anne Neville appears in the historical record as Edward's widow who subsequently married Richard and bore him a son around 1473 and died in 1484 (ODNB). The record also shows that Anne possessed a substantial inheritance that was controlled by Richard after their marriage, but neither this, nor the son and heir, is ever mentioned in Shakespeare's narrative (Hicks). Perhaps the audience would already have been aware of these facts, and so there was no need to reiterate them, but they are not incorporated in any meaningful way. Perhaps the significance is in the flouting of expectations, we see no

(legitimate) courtship, no wedding, no children; Richard is married and then he is widowed; the natural course of events is circumvented. It seems likely that, in the context of the play, the significance of Anne's marriage to Richard is in its illegitimacy and its brevity; in her disturbingly hasty seduction and in Richard's seemingly instantaneous decision to commission her murder.

However, Richard's dispatching of Anne is just one of the many "untimely" deaths he orchestrates in the orchestration of his revenge, and in the forming of his bastardised dynasty. Richard's "untimely" birth results in "untimely violence"; in the fall of the House of Lancaster, the murder of his brother, of his two nephews, and of Hastings, Rivers, Vaughan and Grey, who are all "[u]ntimely smother'd in their dusky graves" (IV. iv. 70). This use of "untimely" reiterates the myths surrounding Richard's birth and solidifies the imagery of him as the illegitimate usurper, disrupting and perverting natural inheritance and natural time. We see how Richard favours "suddenness" in his disruptions, seeking to overcome any doubts or uncertainties that natural time might bring. When Richard gives the instruction for Clarence's murder he explains that while these "secret mischiefs" have been carefully planned, he bids the murderers be "sudden in the execution" lest they be moved to pity (I. iii. 325; 346). Similarly, when Richard first broaches the subject of the young Princes' death with Buckingham, he again insists that it should be done "suddenly":

> Cousin, thou wert not want to be so dull.
> Shall I be plain? I wish the bastards dead,
> And I would have it suddenly perform'd.
> What sayest thou? Speak suddenly; be brief (IV. ii. 16-20).

The word "suddenly" conspicuously appears twice in succession, Richard wishes the murder to be conducted without warning and to have Buckingham's consent without delay. Clarence's murder, while conducted "suddenly", was meticulously planned to produce the most opportune outcome; however, after his coronation, Richard will not, or perhaps cannot, pause for consideration. Suddenness becomes a metaphor for Richard's attempts to outrun the natural order, striving to circumvent the inevitable, he elects to move quickly and without reflection. We see this really come into focus once he has secured the throne. After his success in conquering natural succession, Richard has achieved his vengeance and like revenge protagonists before him, he cannot see his next

move. The performative selves that were once so crucial to his success are inaccessible once he is thrust into the spotlight and he loses all the strategy and control we saw in earlier scenes trying to preserve what he has achieved. Buckingham's hesitation quickly seals his fate with Richard, who swiftly resolves to go on without him, concerned he has become too "circumspect", with time enough to evaluate him with "considerate eyes" (IV. ii. 29-30). Richard's meaning is likely the "careful, deliberate" definition of considerate, rather than the prevalent, modern definition of "showing consideration for the circumstances, feelings, well-being of others" ("Considerate, Adj."). He is concerned that Buckingham deliberates too long, allowing doubts to creep in:

> The deep-revolving witty Buckingham
> No more shall be the neighbour to my counsel.
> Hath he so long held out with me untir'd,
> And stops he now for breath? (IV. ii. 41-4).

As Richard's crimes accumulate his reactions accelerate. Where he previously considered himself a master of time, the weight of the crown appears to instigate a more forceful rejection of the past, and pressure him into moving forward more hastily. In the scene following his coronation, Richard makes a succession of rash decisions, determining to murder the princes, dispatch of Anne, wed Clarence's daughter to some "mean-born gentleman" and to make the young Elizabeth his queen, lest the "kingdom stands on brittle glass" (IV. ii. 53; 61). Where Gloucester previously beguiled and manipulated conspirators to his will, King Richard barks instructions at his servants: "speak suddenly; be brief", "About it", "Look how thou dream'st! I say again […]" (IV. ii. 58; 56; 19). Natural time becomes too slow for Richard and he becomes increasingly frantic about the necessity to keep moving forward without delay. When he is given the news that Buckingham has fled to Richmond he responds:

> Come, I have heard that fearful commenting
> Is leaden servitor to dull delay;
> Delay leads impotent and snail-pac'd beggary.
> Then fiery expedition be my wing,
> Jove's Mercury, and herald for a king.
> Come, muster men. My counsel is my shield.
> We must be brief when traitors brave the field (IV. iii. 49-58).

Here we have another reference to Mercury. In the deliverance of Clarence's pardon Richard sardonically compares himself unfavourably to Mercury ("But he, poor soul, by your first order died, / And that a wingéd Mercury did bear. / Some tardy cripple bore the countermand, / That came too lag to see him buried") (II. i. 86-9). Here, Richard and Mercury are aligned, and Roman mythology is invoked to legitimise Richard's impulsive commands and "fiery expedition", an approach he believes shall maintain his position and lead him to victory.

We see that Richard's approach to timing has changed when he enters Act IV scene iv where there is much talk of speed and haste. Whereas Richard was frequently, strategically interrupting scenes in the previous acts, here he is surprised by what he considers to be the interruption of "tell-tale women" on his expedition (143). He is impatient to continue ("A flourish, trumpets! Strike alarum, drums! […] Strike I say! […] I am in haste"), and this would likely be portrayed physically on stage with the women blocking his path, but the Duchess requests that her son should pause and "patiently hear [her] impatience" (IV. iv. 142; 144; 154; 150). We also see a change in Richard via the wooing of Queen Elizabeth's daughter in this scene. This entreaty is unavoidably comparable to the previous scene in which Richard seduces Anne, but here we see his methodology change. Where Gloucester manipulated and coaxed Anne into submission, King Richard no longer favours the "snail-pac'd beggary" of this approach with the young Elizabeth and asks her mother to "be the attorney" of his intentions (IV. iii. 51; 333).

Where Anne was a stepping stone in Richard's usurpation of the "lineal true derivéd course", it is in Elizabeth that he believes shall annul the past and secure the future III. vii. 181). In Elizabeth, Richard seeks to create a kind of temporal loop, replacing the blood of her murdered brothers with the birth of their children. He knows the only way to secure his throne is to replace the legitimate truths of the past with illegitimate futures, and in the young Elizabeth he sees the opportunity to secure a fast-track lineage. We do not see Elizabeth on stage and it is interesting that this transaction is conducted without her knowledge, as this reemphasises her functional role for Richard, instead he seeks to make the exchange, the past for the future, with her mother. Queen Elizabeth is initially fearful that Richard intends to murder her daughter as he has murdered her brothers:

QUEEN ELIZABETH […] So she may live unscarr'd of bleeding slaughter,
I will confess she was not Edward's daughter.
KING RICHARD Wrong not her birth, she is of royal blood.
QUEEN ELIZABETH To save her life I'll say she is not so.
KING RICHARD Her life is only safest in her birth.
QUEEN ELIZABETH And only in that safety died her brothers.
KING RICHARD Lo, at their births good stars were opposite.
QUEEN ELIZABETH No, to their lives bad friends were contrary.
KING RICHARD All unavoided is the doom of destiny.
QUEEN ELIZABETH True when avoided grace makes destiny.
My babes were destined to a fairer death,
If grace had bless'd thee with a fairer life (IV. iv. 199-210).

There is a lot of linguistic overlap between "birth" and "death" in this scene, foregrounding the tragic conventions of noble births and "noble" deaths. Richard asserts that the brothers' deaths were fated from their births, the "good stars" presumably present at the young Elizabeth's birth being "opposite". Here Richard tries to invoke the type of "destiny" presumed in classical precedents, where oracles foretold the events of an infant's life before they were born but Elizabeth refutes his romantic claims, insisting that the responsibility lie with "bad friends" who make destiny fit their own ends. Elizabeth offers to effectively erase her daughter's past to liberate her future, but Richard protests that it is her lineage that protects her life. Elizabeth asks what honour Richard can "demise to any child of [her's]", and though the word is used here in its legal sense ("to convey, to transmit") it also contains implications of its popular use of "decease, death" and specifically to the "transference or devolution of sovereignty, as by the death or deposition of the sovereign" or the "demise of the crown" ("Demise, N."; "Demise, V."). This conflation is important for it not only foregrounds the specificity of the offer Richard is to make to Elizabeth's daughter, namely that she shall both become and produce his heir, but it also broadly represents all the deaths in the play, which are about transfers or exchanges in one way or another.

As Elizabeth reels from Richard's proposal, he offers to "exchange" Elizabeth's children with her grandchildren:

QUEEN ELIZABETH Shall forget myself to be myself?
KING RICHARD Ay, if your self's remembrance wrong yourself.

QUEEN ELIZABETH But thou didst kill my children.
KING RICHARD But in your daughter's womb I bury them
Where in that nest of spicery they shall breed
Selves of themselves for your recomforture (IV. iv. 340-5).

The raw truth in Elizabeth's line "But thou didst kill my children" gets buried in Richard's metaphor of future heirs replacing their predecessors. Elizabeth asks, "Shall I forget myself to be myself?" but is eventually seduced into surrendering her present grief and fury in the hope of restoring her past self, with royal position and royal children. The metaphorical conflation of "womb" and "tomb" returns here as Richard claims he shall bury the princes in the young Elizabeth's womb. In some sense he is being metaphorical, claiming he shall bury the memory of her lost children in the creation of grandchildren, but there is also a literal, biological meaning in his words. There is a sense that these royal princes represent bloodline placeholders that can easily be replaced with more of the same. Here, we see how the princes' position within the context of primogeniture overrides their position within the family; they are heirs before they are sons, brothers, nephews or grandsons. There is an implicit understanding in Richard's words that children, and particularly royal children, are extensions of their parents rather than individuals in their own right, and consequently Richard is able to offer their replacement to Elizabeth through the promise of grandchildren.[32] The striking imagery of "breed selves of themselves" in Elizabeth's "nest of spicery" reiterates some of the key elements of the play. Richard will never be the continuation (or the restoration) of an ordered succession, and the images of witchcraft and sorcery highlight the illegitimacy of what he is creating, and emphasise the unnatural usurpation of time. Richard urges the engendering of a manufactured future that he believes will neutralise and negate the horrors of the past, but the audience knows is merely a reflection of the same.

For Richard the line of inheritance is not divine, not sacrosanct, but biological, transactional, and ultimately replaceable. Richard refuses to confront and acknowledge

[32] In Rupert Goold's 2016 Almeida Theatre production, Margaret carries a doll in all of her scenes. She passes the doll to Elizabeth in Act IV. sc. iv. when she is bewailing the death of her sons. This image provides a similar commentary on inheritance. The doll acts as a proxy for the children Margaret has lost ("I had an Edward till a Richard killed him") and she passes this loss to Elizabeth after the princes are killed.

the chaos he has created, or the turbulent history that placed him on the throne, and so cannot see that, like so many revengers before him, his vision of the future is merely a repetition of the past. He requests that Queen Elizabeth discount his bloody history and plead anew for him to her daughter:

> Plead what I will be, not what I have been;
> Not my deserts, but what I will deserve.
> Urge the necessity and state of times,
> And be not peevish-fond in great designs (IV. iv. 334-7).

Richard believes that his past can be erased in the achievements of his future, and that "peevish" squabbles can be overcome once the "great designs" of his kingdom have been secured. However, what he fails to realise is that it is in his dishonouring of the past that he seals the short-lived fate of his desired future. Elizabeth accuses Richard of dishonouring all the things good men hold dear: the world, his father's death, himself and God. She proposes that he has nothing left to vouch for his honesty and Richard responds with "the time to come":

> QUEEN ELIZABETH […] What canst thou swear by now?
> KING RICHARD The time to come.
> QUEEN ELIZABETH That thou hast wrong'd in time o'erpast,
> For I myself have many tears to wash
> Hereafter-time for time past wrong'd by thee.
> The children live whose parents thou hast slaughter'd,
> Ungovern'd youth, to wail it in their age.
> The parents live whose children thou hast butcher'd,
> Old withered plants, to wail it with their age.
> Swear not by time to come, for that thou hast
> Misused ere used, by time misused o'erpast (IV. iv. 308-16).

Elizabeth hopes to temper the extremities of Richard's crimes against the past with her laments for the future, but there is doubt as to what that future might represent. With a loss of the previous generation and the generation to come in the parallel statements "The children live whose parents thou hast slaughter'd" and "The parents live whose children thou hast butcher'd", Elizabeth's isolation is similar to that experienced by Thyestes, Hieronimo, or Titus, and her expressions of this are similar ("But hope, heart, treasure, joy, and bliss, / All fled, failed, died, yea, all decayed with this") (*TST*. IV. iv. 89-

94). However, in Richard's proposal she sees the glimmer of a future, which might go some way to explain her surprising decision to acquiesce to his demands. Loxley and Robson argue that aside from Richard, the other characters come to view the future as a "disfigured product of the past" and that this is illustrative of the extent of the "temporal disruption" caused by Richard by this point in the play (Loxley and Robson 29-30). Elizabeth is despondent, desperately searching for a way forward. Richard "wishes to see the future as open, as a time to come" but we see from his disavowal of inheritance and the repetitions of destructive patterns in the broader play, that this cannot be the case (Loxley and Robson 30).

Ghosts, conscience, and living memories

But the past that Richard seeks to escape is present not only in the abstract, not only in the minds of the audience and in the dialogue of the other characters, but is manifest, tangible and present on stage. Relics of the past, ghosts and guilt-ridden delusions are all brought to the fore in the final acts of the play. When Gloucester's intent was to overturn the system he despised, his sense of purpose was relentless and unwavering, but his focus dissolves after the coronation. As King Richard comes to embody the same structures he once undermined, he starts to question himself. King Richard repeatedly demands new beginnings and clean slates ("Plead what I will be, not what I have been;"), but the troubled inheritance of Gloucester catches up with him (IV. iv. 334). Those left still standing, the remnants of Richard's bloody pursuits, most notably the women who are "hungry for revenge", retain the trauma of both the wars and Gloucester's destruction and vow that Richard shall not escape his past" (Iv. iv. 56). The final section of the analysis demonstrates how these living memories orchestrate King Richard's demise, how his desire to expunge his bloody inheritance comes back to haunt him, and how conscience in *Richard III* might be interpreted as a redemptive reading of the inherited guilt of earlier classical precedents.

Margaret is the character that most clearly illustrates the heavy burden of inheritance placed on Richard, the Yorkist line, and on the text itself: she represents the previous events of the tetralogy, their historical predecessors, and, I shall argue, a theatrical inheritance too. Margaret is a "prophetess", but she is also a "living memory", a symbol of inheritance, and a legacy of the past. Outcast from the royal court, her stage

presence and dialogue eulogises the past and highlights the precarious position of hereditary succession. She addresses Elizabeth directly on the similarities of their misfortunes:

> […] see what now thou art:
> For happy wife, a most distressed widow;
> For joyful mother, one that wails the name;
> For queen, a very caitiff crown'd with care;
> For one being sued to, one that humbly sues;
> For one that scorn'd at me, now scorn'd of me.
> Thus hath the course of justice wheel'd about,
> And left thee but a very prey to time;
> Having no more but thought of what thou wert,
> To torture thee the more, being what thou art.
> Thou didst usurp my place, and dost thou not
> Usurp the just proportion of my sorrow? (IV. iv. 92-104).

We see how in usurping Margaret's place as Queen, Elizabeth becomes "prey to time" and repetition of the past. Like Atreus and Thyestes, and the curse of Tantalus, the same traumatic events threaten to repeat again and again. The "wheel of justice" referred to by Margaret echoes the cyclical horror of the hereditary curse, but also the conflicts surrounding the contested line of inheritance in the period. Prior to the opening of *Richard III*, Edward IV had taken the throne from Henry VI in battle, resulting in Elizabeth's usurping of Margaret after the death of her husband and son Edward, heir apparent. We then see Richard move to usurp his brother in the same way and like in preceding revenge tragedies, we see the irony of those "wrongs" committed returning to disturb the perpetrator in kind.

It could be said that Margaret herself represents this return of "wrongs" to disturb the perpetrator. Despite her exile from the royal line, Margaret embodies an interesting position as inheritor in *Richard III*: she provides the most obvious link between the play and its predecessors in Henry VI, between the past and the present English monarchy, and interestingly, between the old and new style of tragedy. Several critics have commented on the historical inaccuracy of having Margaret of Anjou present in the Yorkist palace, for she was exiled to France c.1475 and died in 1482, before Richard took the throne in 1483 (ODNB). M. L. Stapleton comments upon Shakespeare's extended use of this character, as "one of only three characters in the canon who appear in four of his plays", Margaret is resurrected for the fourth play of the tetralogy, presented as a "[…]

vibrant and irresistible presence, in spite of the hostile chronicles that encouraged him to portray her as shrill virago and shallow harridan" (M. L. Stapleton 101; 100). Margaret is one of the strongest connections *Richard III* has to the revenge genre and her anachronistic presence functions as a "living memory" in the play, reminding the other characters (and the audience) of the crimes and retributions that have gone before. Essentially, she serves a similar function to the revenge ghost in the traditional Senecan style; she is a symbol of historical memory, her mere presence among the other characters reminds them of historic crimes, and she calls on fate to avenge her anguish on those who displaced her. Like many revenge protagonists before her, Margaret champions the restorative power of vengeance after the murder of her son and feels this will bring her peace: "[…] wise men ne'er sit and wail their loss, / But cheerily seek how to redress their harms" (*Henry VI 3*. V. iv. 1-2). Yet, unlike the traditional revenge ghost that occupies a transitional space outside of the play, Margaret's quasi-spectral role enables her to bring these transgressions into the action, and into a dialogue with the other characters. Margaret embodies the burden of inherited turmoil and haunts the court of Edward IV with memories, ghosts, and troubled consciences. She declares herself to represent both the past deeds of her usurpers, but also their future downfall in the words of her curses. Where once she partook in the action, now she is banished to the peripheries, echoing old grievances and demanding revenge on what she sees as a jaded reiteration of her past in the present.

Pronouncing herself as Queen Elizabeth's uncanny double Margaret portends how the same fate that consumed her royal family shall befall her usurpers in time ("Thyself a queen, for me that was a queen, / Outlive thy glory like my wretched self") (I. iii. 199-200). And like the revenge ghosts discussed in previous chapters, her position is outside of natural time, her role is somewhere between retrospect and prediction, and serves to remind the audience that revenge dictates that the future shall be a repetition of the past:

> I am hungry for revenge,
> And now I cloy me with beholding it.
> Thy Edward he is dead, that stabb'd my Edward:
> Thy other Edward dead, to quit my Edward;
> Young York he is but boot, because both they
> Match not the high perfection of my loss:

Thy Clarence he is dead that kill'd my Edward;
And the beholders of this tragic play,
The adulterate Hastings, Rivers, Vaughan, Grey,
Untimely smother'd in their dusky graves (IV. iv. 56-65).

Using the familiar symbolic linking of revenge with consumption, Margaret is satisfied, sated, or "cloyed" to see that her debt is almost quitted, like for like, death for death, but of course it is not quite settled, for Richard, "hell's black intelligencer" still lives ("Cloy, V.1"; IV. iv. 66). We see the familiar language of debt and "quitting", balancing Elizabeth's losses with her own, and noting that the princes are "but boot" (extras, additional), as they cannot "match" the "perfection" of her loss (Cartelli 79). Her inherited burden has been reduced, but not lifted, together with the other remnants of Richard's designs, and mothers without children, Elizabeth and the Duchess, she calls upon external forces to complete the revenge. Margaret apostrophises to God to enact justice ("Cancel his bond of life, dear God, I pray"), as do other characters in the play including Anne, Clarence, and Richard himself (IV. iv. 72). In fact, the phrase "God will revenge it" is repeated in almost identical form, five times in the play by Anne, Margaret, Clarence, Gloucester, and Clarence's son (I. ii. 60; I. iii. 137; I. iv. 191; II. i. 138; II. ii. 14). But equally, it does not seem that Margaret prays to what we might recognise as a Christian God in this scene; the imagery is distinctly blurred with the classical: "Earth gapes, hell burns, fiends roar, saints pray, / To have him suddenly conveyed away" (IV. iv. 70-1). They speak of cursing, of "sharp and pierc[ing]" words, but like Titus and Hieronimo, they also come to see their sorrow and their words, as their only meaningful heirs:

DUCHESS OF YORK Why should calamity be full of words?
QUEEN ELIZABETH Windy attourneys to your client woes,
Airy succeeders of intestate joys,
Poor breathing orators of miseries –
Let them have scope: though what they do impart
Help not all, yet they do ease the heart (IV. iv. 120-25).

Cartelli glosses this compacted description of the relationship between language and inheritance, language and efficacy, language and mourning, by explaining the legal terminology embedded in Elizabeth's response of "airy succeeders of intestate joys". It is likely that Elizabeth was referring to words as the "empty legacy of joys that have died

[…] without leaving a will" (Cartelli 81). I would suggest that this again returns to the idea of the childless women on stage here as the remnants or residue of the future that might have been, the future embedded in their children who died before their time without warning and without meaning. They are present as reminders of a legacy of violence, intent on using their "breath of bitter words" to stir up memories that will "smother" the perpetrators (IV. iv. 127).[33]

However, it is important to note that Margaret's role as living memory, as an archetype of inheritance, heritage and legacy is manifold, and her role as bridge between the past and the future in the play extends beyond her participation in the previous events of the tetralogy. M.L. Stapleton suggests that Margaret can be viewed as an inheritor more broadly, with antecedents in the characters of Megaera in *Thyestes,* Tamora in *Titus Andronicus*, and also I would suggest a precursor of the witches in *Macbeth* (Stapleton 39). In this sense, she also represents a link between the old and the new worlds of tragedy. Margaret's participation in *Richard III* is largely through memory and curses, and in this sense, she straddles the line between historical record and fated futures. She brings the past into the present and embodies both the curses and damnation of earlier tragedy and the conscience and individualism of tragedy that would gain popularity from the turn of the seventeenth century. It could be suggested that the tragedies of conscience that would develop later in the period (of which *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* are two obvious examples), moved towards an increasingly Reformist conception of tragedy, where guilt and conscience preside over unwitting transgressors, prophecies and curses, and Margaret's combined role as harbinger of an earlier existence, and personified conscience draws this line neatly in *Richard III*. It is conscience, not fate, that eventually consumes Richard: but this is just as Margaret predicted, so what are audiences to make of Margaret's prophecies?

Margaret's prophecy is her lived experience, she has survived the horrors of the past, and speaks of what she witnessed in the form of curses. Again, this is an element

[33] It is also interesting to note the connotations of the word "smother" with mothers and mothering, of returning to origins, especially in conjunction with the Duchess' following line about "intercepting" Richard by "strangling [him] in her accursèd womb" (IV. iv. 132). For more on this see Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: fantasies of maternal origin in Shakespeare's plays, Hamlet to The Tempest* (2012).

of the play that appears to hark back to classical concepts in its flirtation with the supernatural and determinism, but could also be interpreted from a secular perspective, in the power of the spoken word to influence and persuade – themes we have considered in earlier texts, *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus*. There is little evidence that her words are meant to be interpreted as prophecy from the oracle as in *Thyestes*, as they largely take the form of memories and recollections, employed to prevent Richard (and others) from forgetting their transgressions. Having lost all power within the court, Margaret's words and re-tellings of the past, become her weapons. When King Edward prevents Richard from killing Margaret in *Henry VI 3* he asks: "Why should she live to fill the world with words?" (*Henry VI 3*. V. v. 43). Richard anticipates the influence of Margaret's words in poisoning his allies against him and tries to usurp the predictive power of the curses by substituting Margaret's name for his own:

QUEEN MARGARET	[…] O, let me make the period to my curse.
GLOUCESTER	'Tis done by me, and ends in 'Margaret'.
QUEEN ELIZABETH	Thus have you breathed your curse against thyself (I. iii. 238-41).

The satisfaction of the onstage collective in thinking they have redirected Margaret's vengeance is soon challenged by events unfolding as she predicted. Acknowledgements are made in the order of the characters' victimisation by Richard: with Grey declaring "Now Margaret's curse is fall'n upon our heads" in Act III sc. v, followed by Elizabeth's sorrow in Act IV sc. i "And make me die the thrall of Margaret's curse, / Nor mother, wife, nor England's counted queen", and finally, Buckingham's proclamation in Act V sc. i:

> Now Margaret's curse is fallen upon my head;
> 'When he,' quoth she, 'shall split thy heart with sorrow,
> Remember Margaret was a prophetess (25-7).

Margaret is a prophetess in the sense that she foreshadows the past catching up with the present. What Richard does not understand when he attempts to subvert Margaret's curse, is that the power of her words is not diabolical, their influence is in their reverberations around the stage and among the other characters. The surrounding auditors carry the weight of her curses throughout the rest of the play, as evidenced in their repetition of them in later acts. There is no evidence that her words contain supernatural power (there is stronger, though not conclusive, evidence for this for the

witches in *Macbeth*) and this is demonstrated by Richard's ostentatious rebuttal that bears no fruit. The curse does not return to haunt Margaret but continues the cycle and weighs on those that have usurped her place. In this sense, Margaret is less a "prophetess" than an embodiment of the past; her curses are merely remembrances, their power inflicted by memory, conscience, and the fear of retribution.

Conceptual understandings of conscience in *Richard III* repeatedly overlap with tropes of inheritance and remembrance. Conscience is consistently associated with memory, it is both historical record-keeper and score-settler and comes to represent the remnants of a past that Richard cannot escape. The gods and revenge ghosts of Senecan drama and earlier sixteenth-century tragedy are substituted by conscience, in its role as overseer and instigator of action. It is ultimately conscience that differentiates Richard from his Senecan and post-Senecan predecessors, Atreus, Lorenzo, and Aaron. It is Richard's inescapable guilt that eventually undermines his intent. He is not the half-formed infernal dog of Margaret's curses, for much to Richard's frustration; he has inherited culpability, if not remorse. In the Senecan tradition, ghosts and gods provide the historical framework for the feud playing out on stage, and the characters fall, somewhat unwittingly, into a pattern that has been laid out for them by external forces. But in Shakespeare's history, Richard carries all that has gone before him internally, alternately revelling in its terrible power and buckling under its weight. Conscience becomes one of Richard's many selves, one which he does not recognise and that comes to torment the host with the recounting of powerful, traumatic memories. In this sense, conscience in *Richard III* is symbolic of a different form of self-revenge: Richard initially intended to enact vengeance *for* himself, but ends up enacting vengeance *on* himself, when the weight of his crimes fragments his resolve.

The origin and influence of conscience was a familiar, and often contentious, topic in early modern religious circles. Zachariah Long asserts that early modern scholars considered conscience to be aligned with the divine soul and mortal memory while not quite belonging to either (Z. C. Long 50). In *Conscience in Early Modern English Literature* Abraham Stoll explains that "[i]n early modern English the word conveys both the modern sense of "the moral conscience," and what modernity calls "consciousness" (Stoll 8). We see this duality of meaning in Richard, who initially revels in his lack of

morality, but eventually succumbs to something more like “consciousness”, an internal historical record. Barbara Shapiro describes how the function of conscience was frequently referred to in legal language, as well as religious, as a kind of “inner tribunal” (Shapiro 14). Long observes that, in its most secular light, “conscience was endowed with a degree of independent agency not usually granted to memory” and for Christian theorists and casuists, such as William Perkins, it was described as a “little god sitting in the middle of men’s hearts” (Z. C. Long 51; Perkins and Merrill 9). Conscience is explored in all these myriad ways in *Richard III*, as a harbinger of the past in Margaret, as the “little god” in men’s hearts for Clarence, as a barrier to ambition for the murderers and Richard, and as a judicator and overseer of justice on the battlefield (Perkins and Merrill 9).

When Margaret predicts Richard’s struggle with his internal demons, she describes how his conscience shall eventually “begnaw” his soul. “Begnaw”, defined as corrosion or a type of internal destruction, also has connotations with consumption; Margaret foresees how Richard shall consume, deplete, and ultimately defeat himself ("Begnaw, V."). She describes him as the “troubler of the world’s peace”, which resonates politically, but psychologically too, with a guilty conscience frequently described as a disturber of peace and mental harmony. Initially Richard does not value such peace, describing it as “weak”, but this is contrasted with Richmond, who aims to pursue the “harvest of perpetual peace” in the battle at Bosworth field; a clear conscience is repeatedly aligned with a peaceful and unperturbed mind, with “God’s gentle-sleeping peace” afforded to those who act according to its counsel, and the “worm of conscience” reserved for those who ignore its portents (I. i. 24; V. iii. 15; I. iii 288). Contemporary fears of the tyrant who disregards well-intentioned guidance in favour of autocracy are mirrored here in the fear of one who supresses the counsel of conscience to pursue their own ends. Margaret predicts that the downfall of Richard shall be the revenge of conscience, and in the text’s exploration of conscience, we see the return of the Duchess’ description of war, where men “make war upon themselves, blood against blood […] self against self” (II. iv. 65-6).

Alongside its associations with religious doctrine and moral and common law, the increasingly political dimension of conscience in the sixteenth-century is also pertinent to our discussion. Alexandra Walsham confirms that “the language of conscience was in

constant use in early modern England", particularly in response to the Reformation (Walsham "Ordeals of Conscience" 34). Following the split between Catholicism and Protestantism, the demand for religious conformity presented theological difficulties in compelling citizens to choose between the royal command and sincerely held religious beliefs, which until recently had been publicly sanctioned. In response to the complexity of the issue, Elizabeth's government demanded public adherence, while private practice remained relatively unregulated. Walsham suggests that consideration of individual conscience was key to this decision, for forcing citizens to defy their own consciences "was to commit the most grievous of offences in the eyes of the Almighty" (Walsham "Ordeals of Conscience" 43). Where conscience had once represented a natural, universal inclination towards morality, after the Reformation this understanding diversified and became increasingly fragmented. Multiple, and often conflicting conceptions of God's law, were becoming increasingly common, prompting vigorous discussion of the role of conscience in individual morality, religious conformity and social harmony. A new emphasis was placed on the individual conscience over the external forces of the clergy or the monarchy, and consequently "[t]he torment of not behaving correctly and of dissembling one's faith ceased to be experienced externally; instead it was imagined inwardly" as the voice of chastisement and condemnation (Walsham "Ordeals of Conscience" 48).

These ideas on conscience "emerged as a new and powerfully destabilizing force in European culture" (Slights 233). Individual morality was given precedence as the fragmentation of the medieval church led to "de-emphasis on the mediating power of the clergy, and the doctrine of *sola fides*, the ancient advice to "know thyself" took on new significance" (Slights 233). The Christian duty to cultivate a good conscience, and to learn how to heed its advice became paramount. However, navigating one's conscience was, and often still is, regarded as a "disorientating experience" due to its interpretation as "voice of the 'other' within" (Ojakangas 7-8). Conscience was frequently described and depicted as an interior witness in early modern philosophy, Abraham Stoll describes it as "*knowing with*", a two-way dialogue that is simultaneously "a solipsistically inward experience" (Stoll 79-80). The understanding of conscience as the "alien voice" was extremely widespread, Mike Ojakangas notes that it can be traced back to Cicero and Seneca, and up to the twentieth-century in the "external power" and "autonomy" of

Freud's super-ego (Ojakangas 8; Freud 486-8). However, as understandings of conscience moved away from the innate morality of *synderesis*, and towards the "pricking and wounding" of the "inner tribunal" in the sixteenth century, interpretations of the "other" within became strengthened, with various connotations ranging from personal access to the voice of God, to the "alien" voice with the potential to become an interloper in the mind (Shapiro 14; Stoll 46). We see these ideas played out on stage in *Richard III*, which despite its Senecan inclinations, focuses more on internal judges than wrathful gods or vengeful ghosts. Richard's fate is foretold by the clamour of voices calling for his demise, most notably in Margaret's dialogue and her presence as an echo of his crimes stalking him about the stage. But eventually it is the voice of conscience, the internal voice of the "other" self, that condemns his past actions, and ultimately destroys King Richard.

The conversation between the two murderers in Clarence's prison cell foreshadows Richard's struggle with conscience and reflects this conflict between internal and the external judgement. The murderers acknowledge the distinction between legal and moral law in confirming that they are not afraid "to kill him, having a warrant for it, but to be damned for killing him, from which no warrant can defend [them]" (I. iv. 100-2). The discord between these two positions and how to reconcile them prompts some reflection on the role of individual conscience. The second murderer hopes his conscience will pass like a brief sickness, and there is a sustained implication that conscience is a disease of the mind, an imposter that frustrates the true intentions of its host:

> I'll not meddle with it; it is a dangerous thing;
> It makes a man a coward. A man cannot steal, but it
> accuseth him; he cannot swear, but it checks him; he
> cannot lie with his neighbour's wife, but it detects him. It is a
> blushing shamefac'd spirit that mutinies in a man's bosom:
> and fill's one full of obstacles. It made me once restore a purse
> of gold that I found; it beggars any man that keeps it. It is
> turned out of all towns and cities for a dangerous thing,
> and every man that means to live well endeavours to trust to
> himself and to live without it (I. iv. 118-27).

The repetition of "dangerous thing" is key here, along with the distance placed between the individual and his conscience; the subject is "he" and the object is "it". Conscience "mutinies in a man's bosom" and every man that means to live well "endeavours to trust unto himself and to live without it". The reference to "mutiny" solidifies the understanding

of conscience as an internal enemy. It is clear that the murderer's version of "living well" is subjective, for the examples he provides all represent sin (stealing, blasphemy, adultery), but the speaker forcefully underlines the difference between trusting oneself and listening to conscience and characterises his internal dialogue as being "full of obstacles". There is an ambivalence around the divine and the accursed explored via conscience in the play: it is at once exalted guidance sent from God, and a mutinous act of self-sabotage, but it is always a powerful return of the past on the present. Conscience represents the weight of the past, the fact that "what's done cannot be undone" and must eventually be requited (*Macbeth*. V. i. 63-4). The murderers of Clarence outline how important it is to know thyself, for once such grounding is lost, there is no mediation of action. These earlier scenes explore contemporary philosophy on the role of conscience and prepare the audience for a deviation in the revenge formula of previous drama; they foreground the fact that it will be one of Richard's many selves, one which he cannot manipulate or abandon, that eventually catches up with him, to hold him to account for his past deeds.

We see these internal obstacles laid bare for Richard in Act V sc. iii when, after revelling in his villainy for most of the action, he is overcome by conscience and inherits the full impact of his past. The ghost scene in *Richard III* is particularly interesting because it has no precedent in the previous three plays of the tetralogy, or in the historical sources of Holinshed and More. Richmond describes Richard as "one raised in blood, and one in blood established" and echoing the anti-emotional sentiments he expressed after receiving notice of the death of his father, Richard declares himself beyond reprieve: "But I am in / So far in blood that sin will pluck on sin: / Tear-falling pity dwells not in this eye" (V. iii. 246; IV. ii. 63-5). Most of the deaths of the previous plays occur in battle but, like the Senecan protagonists "in blood established", the bloody deaths instigated by Richard are largely committed by stealth and deception, and without remorse. Prince Edward is stabbed by Richard and King Edward after the battle at Tewksbury; but after King Edward prevents him from killing Margaret, Richard creeps away alone to "make a bloody supper" of King Henry before his brother can intercede (*Henry VI 3*. V. vi. 83). Henry is the first killing Richard acts upon alone and he is the first in a long line of bodies Richard leaves in his wake, a line which shall return to haunt him in a procession of phantoms that symbolise the chronology of his crimes. Both More and Holinshed refer to Richard's

dreaming of “terrible deuils” the night before the battle and speculate that a guilty conscience may have prompted such a disturbance, but Shakespeare’s scene makes this attack of conscience explicitly about his inherited guilt, about the victims he has left behind and crucially, about self-punishment (Holinshed 438). It is true that Richard’s, Senecan-inspired, bloody vengeance occupies most of the play, and that the introspective, self-analysis we see an increasing number of lines dedicated to in later tragedies, is brief and fleeting. However, I would also argue that the bout of conscience that Richard experiences in the final scenes of the play is consistent both with contemporary understandings of conscience, and with the self-fashioned, charming and duplicitous villainy we witness in previous acts. The murders Richard commissions as Gloucester are all executed with skill and poise, but once he becomes King Richard, the murders are instructed through fear and dread (“I must be married to my brother’s daughter, / Or else my kingdom stands on brittle glass”; “As I remember, Henry the sixth / Did prophesy that Richmond should be king”) (IV. ii. 61; 96-7). His panicked and needless brutality in efforts to secure his position isolates him from his allies and leaves him alone to face himself.

Richard’s conscience becomes one of his many performative selves, one which he cannot quite identify, and this is demonstrated by the ghosts, who largely repeat versions of words Richard himself has spoken and heard. As we have discussed, where Richard wooed Anne with a request to “lie with [her] and “live one hour in [her] sweet bosom”, Anne’s ghost returns to attest that she “never slept a quiet hour” with Richard (I. ii. 116; 128; V. iii. 161). In Act I, Richard describes how he “cropp’d the golden prime” of Prince Edward and in Act V he returns to retell how Richard stabbed him in the “prime of youth” (I. ii. 252; V. iii. 120). Anne denounces Richard as the perpetrator of the “holes” in Henry VI, and Henry returns to remind Richard of the body that he “punched full of deadly holes” (I. ii. 14; V. iii. 126). After the murder of the princes Richard boasts “[t]he sons of Edward sleep in Abraham’s bosom” and the ghosts describe themselves as “Edward’s unhappy sons” that shall “be lead within thy bosom” to “weigh thee down to ruin” (IV. iii. 38; V. iii. 153-4). These linguistical echoes endorse the view that the ghosts exist as illustrations of Richard’s troubled inheritance, and I would argue that Shakespeare’s use of ghosts in this way demonstrates an interesting overlap between classical fate and a drama of conscience, for while the ghosts do not enact or oversee the revenge as they

do in the Senecan style, they are the precursor to the vengeance that Richard's conscience will initiate within. Like Margaret, the function of the ghosts is one of living memories and embodiments of the past. Rather than the ever-present observation of Don Andrea in *The Spanish Tragedy*, or the sudden fright of Banquo in *Macbeth*, the ghosts that haunt *Richard III* are contained within the dream sequence of the final act. The ghosts are metaphors and manifestations and we are not given much evidence to support their existence outside of this function. As Patricia Cahill points out:

> In transforming an account of devils who attack Richard to a performance in which the ghosts of his victims pay visits to Richard and Richmond—taking possession of them as they sleep—the play clearly seems to be staging what, in a psychoanalytic lexicon, might be called the traumatic compulsion to repeat (Cahill 215).

Both Margaret and the ghosts occupy slightly different spaces to Richard, and while we see that neither can control the action in the style of say Megaera or Revenge, their words resonate within Richard and Richard awakes from his dream not in fear of hauntings but of himself. Abraham Stoll confirms that such representations of conscience on the early modern stage routinely occurred within dreams:

> If conscience returns, it is important that it returns in a dream. Dreams are themselves an important site of early modern disenchantment, as interpreters disagreed, as with conscience, whether they were forms of supernatural revelation, or merely the physiological effects of the humours of the brain (Stoll 95).

The function of the ghosts is to embody this ambiguity and tread this internal/external line for Richard and for the audience. Emily Shortslef points out that in the anonymous *The True Tragedie of Richard the third,* Richard "ventriloquises each ghost", but that Shakespeare's ghosts "complain […] in their own individual voices" (Shortslef 122). I would suggest that, while the presence of the ghosts on stage distances them from Richard's interior monologue, the uncertainty of their existence accentuates the notion of self-revenge in the play, and the ways in which early-modern philosophers described conscience, as an interior witness, judge, and potential adversary.

The staging of the ghost scene echoes previous points made on inheritance and succession in the play, the ghosts are presented in a lineal procession and their physical

presence on stage is constricted and ordered. Cahill notes the association between this and interpretations of Richard as an impediment to the "natural order":

> Because these ghosts recount a genealogy of offspring and inheritance—suggesting that Richard has violated the proper sequence and that Richmond (improbably) is the rightful heir —the play also seems to articulate an assertion of the principle of succession. Given this emphasis on sequence as well as the fact that so much of the play has represented Richard as the crooked or misshapen figure whose very body suggests his identification with the principle of "obstructing linearity," we might well wonder: is there any reason we should not read the ghost scene as a simple paean to both the linear and the lineal? (Cahill 215-6).

The linear staging of the dream-sequence accentuates Richard's position as usurper to natural inheritance. Richard cannot escape the history embodied by the ghosts and it returns to haunt him at his most vulnerable moment, when he is metaphorically trampled by the ghosts' successive march into a future that will overturn his brief deviation. The ghosts emphasise Richard's deviation of the natural, and act as a reminder that, despite his earlier attempts to outrun retribution in his villainy, he carries the history and the weight of his crimes internally.

The understanding of Richard as an obstruction to linearity is emphasised in his opposition to Richmond, as the true, natural successor. The presentation of both sides of the battle of Bosworth side by side "evokes the divided realm" and foregrounds the imagery of Richard and Richmond as doubles and yet opposites (Cahill 212-3; Wikander 313). Richmond's clear conscience is used as a contrast to Richard's fragmentation:

> The sweetest sleep and fairest boding dreams
> That ever enter'd in a drowsy head […]
> Methought their souls whose bodies Richard murder'd
> Came to my tent and cried on victory (V. iii. 226-30).

Richmond's clear, "untroubled" conscience becomes an active participant here to calm his soul (V. iii. 148; 231). He believes he has God on his side and the ghosts of Richard's victims send "prayers" and "angels" to guard him (V. iii. 136-7). The religious inferences associated with Richmond's peace of mind in this scene contrast with the "hell of ugly devils" that Margaret promises will haunt Richard and reflect the divergent interpretations of conscience in the period discussed earlier (I. iii. 224). It is made clear that in-line with

Henry's prophecy, Richard represents the past and Richmond the future, underscored by the language referring to the abrupt close of Richard's line and the prosperity of Richmond's. The words spoken by the ghosts to Richmond almost all represent futurity and legitimacy. Clarence addresses Richmond with the following: "Thou offspring of the house of Lancaster, / The wronged heirs of York do pray for thee" and the princes affirm "Live, and beget a happy race of kings! / Edwards unhappy sons do bid thee flourish" (135-6; 156-7). The ghosts reinforce this antithesis with their contrasting language, repeating the phrase "Despair and die" to Richard and "Live and flourish" to Richmond (V. iii. 119; 129). The ghosts confirm in their mnemonic repetitions that they shall "sit heavy" and supress Richard and "comfort" and "fight [on] behalf" of Richmond (V. iii. 117; 122; 121).

This opposition is reimagined as an internal struggle with Richard's various selves when he is left alone on stage. The word "myself" is uttered forty-two times in *Richard III,* and twenty-six of those are spoken by Richard. When Richard awakes from his devilish dream he speaks for thirty lines and refers to "myself" twelve times in quick succession:

> O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!
> The lights burn blue. It is now dead midnight.
> Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.
> What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by.
> Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.
> Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am:
> Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why:
> Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself?
> Alack. I love myself. Wherefore? For any good
> That I myself have done unto myself?
> O, no! alas I rather hate myself
> For hateful deeds committed by myself!
> I am a villain – yet I lie: I am not.
> Fool, of thyself speak well. Fool, do not flatter.
> My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
> And every tongue brings in a several tale,
> And every tale condemns me for a villain (V. iii. 178-194).

The repeated use of caesura in these lines demonstrates Richard's struggle in identifying the "I" in the "thousand several tongues". Referring to himself, both in the third person and in the plural, Richard's precarious identity begins to further fragment, embodying concerns with conscience that were prevalent in the period. His conscience plays the

familiar roles of “judge and witness” in the “inner tribunal” yet he does not recognise the voice of rebuke from within (“Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why”) and struggles to differentiate between the “thousand several tongues” or rather, *distinct* tongues, that voice condemnation (Sullivan 123; Shapiro 14; Cartelli 98). Through this we return to the power of words, myths and stories, as Richard fears the many, varied tales that condemn him for a villain. We are reminded of the many personas Richard has embraced on stage and the many and varied expectations placed upon him. Richard spends most of the plot in control of the myriad characters and voices he employs, and it appears Richard can still detect the Machiavel we were first introduced to amongst the clamour of condemnation (“Richard loves Richard […] is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am”), but he loses his grasp on the on this additional self that cannot be identified: the enemy from within, that undoes all the rest.

It has been remarked upon how belated a role conscience appears to play for Richard. Daniel Hughes argues that unlike in *Macbeth*, *Richard III* contains “no evidence […] of a convincing encounter with conscience” (Hughes 852). And it certainly could be argued that Richard only begins to feel the sting of conscience when he runs out of outward figures upon which to enact his rage and sense of injustice. Hughes suggests that this is due to the elements of morality theatre that Shakespeare combines with a largely Senecan plot:

> In *Richard III* conscience becomes a kind of psychological overlay on a Senecan drama of fate, to remind us that there is a free encounter of the individual human will and the moral law. If the reminder is unconvincing, it is because such plays are essentially pageant-like sequences of historical episodes which carry their own lesson and transcend the drama of the individual (Hughes 852).

As we have discussed, it is true that early modern tragedy was a genre “compounded of multiple traditions”, and *Richard III* is one of the plays that embodies this hybridity most clearly, being part history, part tragedy and part classical, part vernacular (Bushnell "Classical and Medieval Roots" 289). And it is possible that the late addition of conscience to Richard’s character appears primarily to satisfy the expectations of the audience to witness “the moral downfall of a protagonist” (Bushnell "Classical and Medieval Roots" 304). However, I would suggest that the seeming “suddenness” of Richard’s encounter with conscience has been foregrounded in the use of multiple selves we have discussed,

and through the recurring repetitions of his past, from Margaret, but also from Anne, Elizabeth, and the Duchess of York. The introspective, guilt-ridden King Richard of Act V is not inconsistent with the previous depiction of the adroit, Machiavellian Duke of Gloucester when one is viewed as a direct consequence of the other. The usurping voices that trouble Richard not only represent those of his victims, but of the multitude of selves Richard employed to achieve his aims. It is true that the character we recognise from the first four acts begins to disintegrate after Richard is crowned, but it is also true that Richard's masterful villainy was never figured as a comprehensive whole but as a miscellany of disparate characteristics.

Bushnell argues that Richard "consistently adopted "his accusers' rhetoric to construct his own version of sovereignty" and once Richard has no one left from whom to deflect and reflect his identity we begin to see the harmony of his personas unravel (Bushnell *Tragedies of Tyrants* 119). These "several tongues" come back to divide him when he most requires coherence and unity:

> Perjury, perjury, in the highest degree,
> Murder, stern murder, in the direst degree.
> All several sins, all used in each degree,
> Throng to the bar, crying all, Guilty! Guilty! (195-8).

It is appropriate that conscience only begins to trouble Richard once he has expended all his allegiances in his pursuit of the crown and his systematic manipulation loses momentum when runs out of subjects to mimic and deceive. Buckingham absconds when can no longer keep up with Richard's pace and from this point Richard's solitary rule becomes increasingly rash and misjudged. Adjectives relating to "incomplete" are frequently used to describe Richard, by others and by himself, ("unfinished", "abortive", "curtail'd" "indigest deformed lump"), and this becomes clearer as the play progresses when Richard's composite personality fractures upon self-analysis (I. i. 20; 18; I. iii. 225; *Henry VI 3*. V. vi. 51). Richard's isolation is highlighted by the various references to being left alone the night before the battle ("hie thee to thy charge", "Bid my guard watch. Leave me", "Leave me, I say") and we see how his anger consequently turns in on itself ("What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by") (50; 75; 77; 181). Richard has depended on his multiple faces and his subordinate position to protect him from the harsh realities of his actions but once there is no one left to shield him, he emerges from the shadows and

perishes in the spotlight, exposed to the ferocity of his divisions (Bushnell *Tragedies of Tyrants* 120). Perhaps one of Richard's more truthful lines was his admission in the opening soliloquy that he is not made for peace, only war ("I that am not made for sportive tricks"), for once the battles are over he is lost, and once Richard has exhausted his options with all those around him, he enacts vengeance on himself (I. i. 14).

Richard's "inner tribunal" ultimately destroys him as he cannot establish a concrete self, he uses scraps of character from those around him, rumour, and mythology to create a myriad of disposable personas that allow him to temporarily circumvent the weight of his past. He is an amalgamation and a hybrid, of what has come before, and what people expect him to be all at once, and this piecemeal personality reflects the "mongrel" genre of the play (Bushnell "Classical and Medieval Roots" 289). Renaissance Tragedy has frequently been compared to a mirror reflecting contemporary concerns around immorality or weakness in the ruling elite and in *Richard III* we see a protagonist who skilfully employs reflective techniques to avoid suspicion but being "not made to court an amorous looking-glass", cannot bear to see himself (I. i. 15). Richard holds a mirror up to the other characters throughout the play, encouraging them to see in him what they want to see in him. To Anne he is the misguided lover, to Clarence he is the loyal brother, to the Princes he is "Lord Protector" and guardian. Each of these assumed characters is effective, in turn, as a stepping stone to power, but once the journey is over Richard has lost every ally, he has no one to emulate or manipulate, he is left alone on stage for his final soliloquy, confronted by a fragmented self he can no longer fuse together. In the end King Richard cannot shake off the inheritance of Gloucester, in his guilt or in his divergent selves; the "thousand tongues" of conscience recount and reproduce his sins, and he cannot find any pity for himself (V. ii. 192; 202). Richard acts vengeance on himself in an act of self-punishment and self-sabotage, emphasising the dominance and impact of the past in this play. Thyestes, Hieronimo, and Titus all end their lives with the intent of purging the future from their legacy of violence; Richard doesn't consciously self-destruct, he is still fighting at the last, but in essence, the message is the same.

Richard fears "revenging" himself upon himself for his "hateful deeds" and we are reminded of Richard's first demonstration of his manipulative skills in the wooing of Lady Anne, where she admonishes Richard with "curse thy cursèd self" and "enact worthy vengeance on thyself" (I. ii. 78; 85). Richard mocked Anne with wordplay in this early

scene, but we see how her words come to pass as conscience becomes the cursèd avenger determined to destroy Richard from within. It is significant that Richmond is not presented as the opposing revenger with all its cyclical, violent connotations, for if Richard revenges himself on himself and, thus stems the call for blood, then Richmond can be legitimately cast as the holy redeemer to put an end to the violence. The opposition observed between Richmond and Richard, holy and evil, legitimate and illegitimate, loved and hated, becomes internalised, and in a foreshadowing of the battle to come, Richard turns upon himself as the wrongdoer, unable to "recognise or acknowledge any integrity of self" (Wikander 314).

In an attempt to heal the divided and disjointed nation Richard leaves behind in his image, Richmond, like Lucius in *Titus Andronicus*, speaks of incorporating past wrongs in his victory, vowing to remember those who had given their lives on either side he instructs Lord Stanley to "Inter their bodies as become their births":

> England hath long been mad, and scarr'd herself:
> The brother blindly shed the brother's blood,
> The father rashly slaughter'd his own son,
> The son, compell'd, been butcher to the sire.
> All this divided York and Lancaster,
> Divided in their dire division.
> O, now, let Richmond and Elizabeth,
> The true succeeders of each royal house,
> By God's fair ordinance conjoin together!
> And let their heirs, God, if thy will be so.
> Enrich the time to come with smooth-faced peace,
> With smiling plenty and fair prosperous days! (V. v. 23-34).

By bringing an end to the madness that leads to the scarring of oneself, a nation and its people "divided in their dire division", Richmond alludes to the senseless vengeance of the civil war and Richard's destruction and disintegration. With Richard's death, the conclusion of the play is one of synthesis and coalescence, between the houses of York and Lancaster, between enemies and friends (brothers, fathers, sons) and between the past and the present; quitting the violent inheritance of the past and giving the audience a future they can believe in via Richmond and the future Elizabethan line.

4. Inheritance and legacy: permeations, adulterations, and conclusions in *The Revenger's Tragedy*

Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy,* first performed at the start of the Jacobean reign in 1606, has been identified as "one of the last great tragedies composed under the specific influence of the Kydian formula" (Bowers 132). The play exhibits an acute awareness, almost a summary, of Kyd and its Elizabethan precedents, with its integration of multiple revenge plots, overt metatheatrical commentary and a central protagonist driven to the edge of madness. Brian Walsh observes how the play "is keenly aware of itself as a play built along [the] prefabricated specifications" of its genre, containing "several moments of metatheatrical commentary on the pleasure it affords audiences by hitting its marks" (Walsh 11). Frequently considered Middleton's "reply to *Hamlet"*, *The Revenger's Tragedy* provided a parodic commentary on the genre whose popularity had dominated the Elizabethan stage. Appealing to diverse audiences with its fast-paced melodrama and wry, metatheatrical observations, Middleton's text incorporates a multitude of familiar tropes, several intersecting plotlines and an abundance of bloody deaths into a drama that is "not hesitant but hectic […] ironic and obscene, tragic and blackly comic" (Taylor "Middleton, Thomas (Bap. 1580, D. 1627)"). *The Revenger's Tragedy* occupies an intriguing position with regards to our exploration of inheritance in revenge drama, as a text which embraces, supersedes, and parodies its precedents, and through which conventions converge and transmute into something fresh. Many have regarded the play as a conclusion to the revenge genre, and while this may not be strictly true, its frantic mania ("Hurry, hurry, hurry"), convergent plotlines, flagrant theatricality, and "characteristic mockery" certainly makes an interesting commentary on the Senecan revenge concept of *maius nefas* (II. i. 201; Hirschfeld "The Critical Backstory" 40). Outstripping its predecessors in "greater horror", *The Revenger's Tragedy* incorporates, parodies, and consumes its precedents in five acts of sheer indulgence where "nine years' vengeance crowd into a minute" (III. v. 123).

Corruption is the shared inheritance of *The Revenger's Tragedy*; a perpetual threat from other bodies, from environments, and from concepts or ideas. Middleton's play returns to the corporeal, fleshy understandings of inheritance we saw in *Thyestes.* However, with a male monarch back on the throne, we see a more overt misogyny in the

concerns of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, where the inconstancy of women and the female body threaten to destroy the legitimacy and integrity of the court. Yet while womankind is frequently blamed for pervasive sexual corruption in the play, it is not only women that are criticised for a lack of integrity in *The Revenger's Tragedy* (McAdam 97; 106). The lecherous Duke, his lustful son and the sexual economy of the play-world are all condemned in this bleak milieu of human depravity. Illegitimacy is foregrounded as a trope of inherited corruption, with female chastity as its primary fortification: the porousness of the female body and its vulnerability to polluted environments and malicious intent is an anxiety that pervades the play. As in *Hamlet*, there is a preoccupation with inwardness and deception, but *The Revenger's Tragedy* focuses more explicitly on the boundaries that protect against the infiltration of external influences and how integrity can (or cannot) be preserved. Internal disintegration permeates the characters and the text, as the narrative escalates towards a conclusion that refuses incorporation or understanding. Vindice does not desire continuity with an idealised past, like many protagonists of this study, as he believes both the past and the present are beyond salvation.

Several critics have aligned this sense of nihilism in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, a play which "foredoom[s] the protagonists from the beginning", with Middleton's affinities with Calvinism (Heinemann 1). Whether Middleton sought to espouse or critique Puritan ideology in his plays of human frailty has been a source of much debate.[34] However, what is certain is that Calvinism was a significant influence in Middleton's life, and consequently his work reflects on these ideas more intensely than many of his contemporaries (Taylor "Thomas Middleton: Lives and Afterlives" 28). Douglas Bruster argues that Calvin and Middleton both shared a fondness for "potential absolutes",

[34] There is some critical debate about the potential contradiction in talking about Calvinist theatre, given the well-documented Puritan criticism of the theatrical medium. However, more recently critics have pointed out that earlier Protestant philosophy (before the closing of the theatres in 1642) was more ambivalent about the theatre (Heller 17; Stachniewski 227; Heinemann vii). Herbert Jack Heller observes that "Calvin himself has some things to say about the theatre, including comedy, which suggest a divided opinion rather than the usual dismissal of theatre associated with Calvinism" (Heller 17). More about Middleton and Calvinism can be found in Margot Heinemann *Puritanism and Theatre* (1982), John Stachniewski "Calvinist Psychology in Middleton's Tragedies" in *The Three Jacobean Revenge Tragedies* (1991), Herbert Jack Heller, *Penitent Brothellers: Grace, Sexuality, and Genre in Thomas Middleton's City Comedies* (2000), and Ian McAdam "Calvinism and the Problematic of Character in *The Revenger's Tragedy"* in *The Revenger's Tragedy: State of Play* (2018).

between the godly and the human, between good and evil, between salvation and damnation, and between the spirit and the flesh (Bruster 529; Stachniewski 237). The corruption and the sexual debauchery showcased in Middleton's play is evocative of the Calvinist doctrine of "total depravity", a belief in the innate sinfulness of humankind derived from original sin (Heller 33; Stachniewski 233). This emphasis on innate sinfulness and the desires of the flesh is pertinent for my discussion of inheritance, for we see how sexual depravity and perversion is passed down the Duke's family line like a virus, in a similar way to the hereditary curse. There are many metaphors linking inborn sinfulness and original sin with a type of inherited "disease" in Calvinist doctrine and we see these lexical connections in Middleton's description of the Italian court (Schmidt 63). Vindice is acutely aware of the inherited vice that plagues his enemies: he frequently describes Lussurioso's lasciviousness as inherited from his father, and comments on the Duke's desire to return to the place "guilty / of his forefathers' lusts" (III. v. 15). Vindice highlights the "[d]runken procreation, which begets so many drunkards" and in so doing implicates the Duke in Lussurioso's parallel failings, crafting the image of familial and political "pollution" spreading down the patrilineal line and across kin via incestuous liaisons (I. iii. 57). *The Revenger's Tragedy* presents a world of "fallen behaviour" and purgation, and Vindice singles out familial relationships, and "corrupting patrimony", for particular distain and mistrust, for they are symbolic of sexuality, the sinful flesh, and inherited corruption (Bruster 530; Hirschfeld *The End of Satisfaction* 72).

The Revenger's Tragedy provides a fitting conclusion to this analysis as it pointedly flouts the emergent trend for memory, continuity and legacy that I have discussed in the revenge tradition. Thomas P Anderson suggests that while "memory [as] a process of exchange between living and dead" is accentuated throughout revenge plays such as *Hamlet*, "[t]he claims of the past […] are precisely what are lost in *The Revenger's Tragedy*" (Anderson 159). It is true that last-ditch attempts at cohesion and stability are not always convincing in revenge narratives, but *The Revenger's Tragedy* self-consciously thwarts the possibility of incorporation and continuity. Vindice has achieved his revenge (and more), but there is no honourable death, or self-sacrifice, he is simply condemned and dragged from the stage. Antonio curtails Vindice's indulgence in his supposed purgation of the sins of the past with a brief command ("Away with 'em"), and a laconic suggestion that Vindice is no better than those he has slain (and perhaps, that

Antonio is no better than the Duke): “You that would murder him would murder me” (V. iii. 104). Carol Neely observes how *The Revenger’s Tragedy* is frequently interpreted “as the end point of the genre’s first stage - as belated, as camp, parody, or exhaustion” (Neely 155). In this chapter I consider, not only how the play uses and transforms revenge tragedy conventions of inheritance and legacy, but also how the text itself can be understood as both an ending and a beginning; simultaneously an inheritor and sponsor of new traditions in its visually chaotic (and yet meticulously organised) ensemble.

This chapter shall explore themes of biological inheritance, mothers, fathers, gestation, and sexual incontinence in *The Revenger’s Tragedy* and demonstrate how the play problematises inheritance and rejects earlier trends towards continuity and legacy in the genre. I start with an examination of the text’s complex relationship with inheritance and lineage, and the critical debate surrounding its authorship, before moving on to the thematic considerations of inheritance in the play. I shall divide the thematic analysis into four sections considering inheritance and linearity, sexual economy, pollution and permeability, and finally, storytelling and conclusions. Through this I hope to demonstrate how the play self-consciously builds upon and surpasses the genre conventions I have explored in this thesis to depict an extravagant and immoderate world of problematic and polluted heritage.

Genre and authorship

While Middleton is clearly and self-consciously beholden to his antecedents in Seneca, Kyd and Shakespeare, the text itself also has a complicated history of inheritance, the surviving anonymous edition having been misattributed for many years. The play was originally considered to have been written by Cyril Tourneur but was re-attributed to Thomas Middleton in 1926 and this theory has been generally accepted from the 1980s (Taylor "Middleton, Thomas (Bap. 1580, D. 1627)"). Michael Neill has remarked upon this coincidence:

> By a weird irony, given its preoccupations, circumstances have conspired to visit a kind of disinheritance upon [*The Revenger’s Tragedy*]: not only has it been robbed of its true paternity, it appears even to have been cheated of its proper name (Neill "Bastardy, Counterfeiting, and Misogyny" 397).

Neill refers to another 1606 title by Middleton, *The Viper and Her Brood* which some consider to be a different play, now lost, and others consider to be the original title for *The Revenger's Tragedy.* Neill goes on to suggest that *The Viper and Her Brood* (referring to the Duchess, her sons, and stepson) may have been a more suitable title for the work, as "the existing title makes revenge the nominal subject of the play" and although the "comic extravagance of this play's intricate revenge plotting accounts for much of the pleasure of its action […] revenge is scarcely dramatized as a problem here" (Neill "Bastardy, Counterfeiting, and Misogyny" 397-8). I would suggest that while *The Viper and Her Brood* may foreground the emphasis on "the gender-coded issues of inheritance and usurpation that are given exceptional prominence in the play's satiric design"; titular emphasis on the Duchess and her children does not quite seem appropriate either, as most of the gender-concerns of the play revolve around Vindice's mother and sister (Neill "Bastardy, Counterfeiting, and Misogyny" 398). I would suggest that while avenging Gloriana's death does not take up the majority of the action or the dialogue in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, the wider concept of revenge as the requiting of sin does. Building on the Senecan notion of excess, an inordinate and frankly implausible number of revenge plots collide in *The Revenger's Tragedy, so* much so, that critics have debated whether the apostrophe should be pluralised in the title (i.e. *The Revengers' Tragedy*). Vindice's revenge is largely a conceptual one against the epidemic of human depravity he witnesses in the Italian court.

However, the play's uncertainty with regards to authorship, genre, and even the title, has been considered an asset by some critics, Carol Neely believes the anonymity enables critics to consider the play "with fewer constraints", and to analyse the work alongside the "generic siblings" it builds upon and subverts, rather than within the context of Middleton, or indeed Tourneur's work (Neely 155). Themes of imitation, mimicry and pretence from within the narrative extend to its context and legacy of anonymity. Neely goes on to find authorial parallels in the final scene, in which Vindice and Hippolito voluntarily confess to their part in the mayhem and are instantaneously condemned for it, suggesting "[p]erhaps the author, unlike his protagonist, Vindice, resisted announcing his identity in order to protect himself" (Neely 155). Neely proposes that *The Revenger's Tragedy* can only be understood with reference to the plays that surrounded it, that it is consistently "in intimate, ongoing dialogue with its companion plays" and in imitating and

competing with them it provokes consideration of the revenge tragedy genre as a unified group (Neely 164). In this chapter, while recognising that the debate is, to some extent, ongoing, I refer to Middleton as the author of the text, but the significance of the work shall be firmly placed on its foregrounding of inheritance and legacy themes, alongside its interaction with genre and texts that came before and after. It is evident that Middleton does not simply "borrow" elements from contemporary plays of its ilk (*Hamlet, The Spanish Tragedy, Titus Andronicus* and John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* to name a few) but knowingly uses this composite status, drawing attention to the play's complex interaction with inheritance and legacy. For example, *The Revenger's Tragedy* inherits many of its themes from *Hamlet,* including inwardness, mortality, inheritance and, most notably, female sexuality, exploring the boundaries of virginity and penetrability from chaste maids (Ophelia/Castiza) to corrupted mothers (Gratiana/Gertrude).[35] Middleton invites the audience to make this comparison from the very first scene, with the image of Vindice onstage holding a skull. Yet *The Revenger's Tragedy's* approach to all these motifs is vastly different from *Hamlet*; contemplation is not a technique employed by Vindice. *The Revenger's Tragedy* takes these tropes to outrageous, chaotic and comic excess; building upon (and exceeding) its predecessor in the Senecan revenge style of *maius nefas,* creating a frantic style of hyper-artificiality, in a world of "apace, apace, apace, apace" (II. ii. 143).

However, the play has earlier antecedents than *Hamlet*; it is evident the text has "formal and thematic roots" in ancient and medieval drama (Hirschfeld "The Critical Backstory" 32). Vindice enters the stage holding a skull, evoking images from *Hamlet,* but then proceeds to deliver a familiar-style of semi-choric prologue, introducing the characters of the court and the past grievances and the vendettas that are ongoing at the opening of the action. The characters are named after their characteristics (and chiefly their primary failings) in the style of the morality play; Vindice meaning "avenger" in Italian, Lussurioso meaning "lustful" and Ambitioso and Supervacuo, translating as the "ambitious" and "useless/foolish", as the children of a corrupt royal line headed up by figureheads named only as "Duke" and "Duchess" (Middleton, Taylor and Lavagnino

[35] There is an ongoing critical debate about Ophelia's chastity, for recent explorations of this topic see Amelia Worsley, "Ophelia's Loneliness" and Jessica Murphy, *Virtuous Necessity: Conduct Literature and the making of the Virtuous Woman in early Modern England* (56-70).

350). Walsh describes how the characters “bump against the boundaries of being embodied concepts” (Walsh 12). Spurio, for example, entirely befits the associations of his name, but rather than simply representing a conceptual idea, Spurio deliberately and self-consciously embraces the negative stereotype of the early modern bastard and manipulates it to his own ends. One might think Vindice as “avenger” would be the most appropriate nomenclature, but even this is complicated and called into question by Middleton, for as Heather Hirschfeld has recently commented, in *The Revenger’s Tragedy* “revenge motifs” frequently “serve functions *other than* revenge”, and I would suggest, superfluous to revenge: but this is something we shall return to later (Hirschfeld "The Critical Backstory" 39).

Hirschfeld proposes that reading *The Revenger’s Tragedy* only along the lines of the revenge genre could be simplifying its appeal, for the text appears to borrow conventions and plot-devices from multiple genres: “the early twentieth-century codification of a subgenre of ‘revenge tragedy’, narrowed [critics’] focus to the play’s obsession with vengeance” (Hirschfeld "The Critical Backstory" 33). Vindice introduces himself as a “moral purger of a corrupt court” avenging his “poisoned love” Gloriana, who was murdered by the duke for rejecting his sexual advances (Bowers 133). However, despite the play’s indebtedness to earlier works discussed in this thesis, such as *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Thyestes*, and immediate precursors such as *Hamlet*, a sense of personal justice is not the sole steer of the plot. Vindice’s personal grievance is merely a microcosm of the corrupt system and he gets caught up in multiple motives: avenging Gloriana, saving the Italian court, exploring the moral failings of his own family, and ensuring the takeover of new, pure, royal succession. When Vindice’s brother, Hippolito, asks “Still sighing o’er death’s vizard?” the audience are reminded of Hamlet’s musings on Yorick and recognize how Gloriana’s skull symbolises an impetus to action (I. i. 49). Yet while Hamlet ponders on the meaning of mortality with Yorick’s skull in Act 5, we appear to join Vindice at this same point in the very first scene as he discusses his plans for the Duke with Hippolito. From the outset, *The Revenger’s Tragedy* indicates to the audience that this plot will not concern itself with delay but surround itself with action and retribution for the “sin foul and deep” that envelops the court (II. ii. 110). In fact, the play is so “nimble in damnation, quick in tune” that when Gloriana is avenged with the death

of the Duke in Act III sc. v, the play continues with two more acts, a further nine deaths and two condemnations (IV. iv. 35).

As we have established, *The Revenger's Tragedy* is a play in which many revenge conventions converge to the point of parody – including multiple conceptions of inheritance and legacy. Interestingly, Michael Neill refers to the play as a "literary bastard work" with regards to its complicated history of attribution, its incorporation of numerous traditions and narratives, and its exploration of legitimacy and inheritance. Legitimate and illegitimate sons fight for their place in the patrilineal line and women are placed under intense scrutiny as keepers of the familial façade of integrity. Antonio is presented as the concluding heir of the play, inheriting the court rather suddenly towards the end of the final act. It could be suggested that a distinctly unsatisfactory resolution or conclusion is another trope of the genre, but Antonio's instalment as Duke is unusual in the fact that it has so little foregrounding that it appears to come as a surprise to the characters themselves. Antonio appears in Act V after the bloody murders and during Lussurioso's final breaths to take charge of the chaos, but prior to this he hasn't made an appearance for almost three acts. Perhaps this is Middleton's final send up of the genre. Antonio is not the traditional aggrieved onlooker wishing to proceed into an era of peace (like Marcus from *Titus Andronicus* or Richmond from *Richard III)*; it seems impossible for Antonio to represent this type of "saviour" willing to address and incorporate lessons learned in the horrors of the court – simply because he hasn't been present, and this is something which we shall also explore later in the chapter.

Inheritance and linearity

While royal succession might not be as immediate a concern for Vindice as it is for Hamlet, Titus, or Richard III, similarly problematic relationships with inheritance and gestation pervade the play. There is no dead King in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, no patrilineal ghost calling for vengeance and yet, as Michael Neill argues, "paternity and succession" and "illegitimate substitutions" haunt the action of the play more intensely than in its Shakespearean precursor (Neill "Bastardy, Counterfeiting, and Misogyny" 409). Zenon Luis-Martínez suggests that *The Revenger's Tragedy* initiates the trend of Jacobean and Caroline tragedy in devoting its primary attention to domestic concerns rather than the body politic (Luis-Martínez 170). I would suggest that while the concerns

of *The Revenger's Tragedy* are less overtly civic than say *The Spanish Tragedy* or *Titus Andronicus*, it is also clear that Middleton imposes the personal on to the political throughout the text. Vindice's anxieties surrounding his family's corruption are a microcosm of his feelings about the polluted line headed by the "royal lecher", and more generally about the human condition (I. i. i). The way the play addresses notions of inheritance is a good example of this, for its plot is not principally concerned with a megalomaniac bid for sovereignty, a son or a brother usurping their birth right, or a shunned heir plotting his revenge. It does feature all of these things, of course, but they are subplots to Vindice's central scheme. Vindice is a relative commoner for a tragic hero, the son of a "discontent[ed]" "nobleman", he voices no designs on the crown or royal ambitions (I. i. 127). Vindice is an onlooker to the inheritance of the court, his revenge is not concerned with displacing the familial line, or usurping his place within it, his desire is to extinguish the line, for it is corrupted and corrupting. His inaugural motive for revenge is his, relatively anonymous, "betrothed lady", and her untimely death at the hands of the Duke, but his broader motive is a despair for the seemingly innate corruptibility of the whole court (I. i. 16).

Vindice's "obsessive concern with the materiality of sex and blood" prompts him to ascertain how far beneath the surface corruption lies in various directions (Luis-Martínez 172). While Vindice's grievance is ostensibly against the Duke, at various stages of the plot, his attention is focussed on trying more peripheral characters in his court of corruption while more traditional plotlines involving royal brothers vying for power (Ambitioso and Supervacuo) and brooding, disinherited sons (Spurio) play out in the background. And while the protagonist identifies the death of his beloved as motivation for revenge, there is also a "supplementary" and brief reference to his "deject[ed]" father who died of "discontent, the nobleman's consumption" at the hands of the Duke (I. i. 124;127). Fredson Bowers notes what he considers, Middleton's "feeble" addition of "the traditional revenge of a father" in these opening scenes and the interesting lack of attention given to this theme (Bowers 132-3). This may be part of *The Revenger's Tragedy's* indulgence in various theatrical traditions and conventions. Vindice's famous line "Oh, 'twill be glorious / To kill 'em doubled, when they're heap'd!" has a wider resonance for the text, for many things are "heaped" and "doubled" throughout the play, including bodies, motives, deceit and metatheatrical themes and traditions to create a

“glorious” spectacle of excess in the final scenes (II. iii. 4). However, Ian McAdam suggests that fathers are of markedly less importance in *The Revenger’s Tragedy* than in *Hamlet,* where Hamlet inherits a pervasive sense of responsibility from the idealised apparition of his father, Vindice renounces inheritance altogether (McAdam 93-5). As we see from his later interactions with his mother, all inheritance is problematic for Vindice, and he seeks to evade its impurity through “self-begetting, self-destruction and self-creation” (Hirschfeld "Original Sin and the Allures of Vengeance" 206).

The opening speech by Vindice introduces the audience to the “four ex’lent characters” at the centre of the incestuous world of the court:

> VINDICE Duke – royal lecher! Go, grey-haired adultery;
> And thou his son, as impious steeped as he;
> And thou his bastard true – begot in evil;
> And thou his duchess that will do with the devil;
> Four ex’lent characters (I. i. 1-5).

Similar to the ghosts in *Richard III*, the lineal procession foregrounds the notion of inheritance*,* and the stream of sexual language (“lecher”, “adultery”, “impious”, “bastard”, “begot in evil”, “do with the devil”) highlights how sexual incontinence and illegitimacy have corrupted the royal line. However, I would suggest that it also betrays a broader distaste for “begetting” and parent-child relationships in the play. The only substantial examples of patrilineal succession in the play are headed by the “lecher” Duke, where we see how each relationship tainted with greed, lust, and nascent usurpation, and the corruption and deception flows unnaturally in both directions. Ian McAdam argues that the father-son relationships of *The Revenger’s Tragedy* are illustrative of Calvinist doctrine on innate human immorality:

> [I]n Middleton, the role of father and son does not involve respectful emulation and eventual loving succession through manly inheritance of responsibility, but a hellish form of parasitical consumption by both usuring father, preying upon the financially needy, and the greedy, expectant son, heartlessly and foolishly squandering his inheritance in anticipation. Such hellish composition seems the natural result of a theology which completely denies the desideratum of human integrity (McAdam 97).

We see the Calvinist opposition of the noble “spirit” and “fleshly desire” in Vindice’s description of the court, where familial relationships are symbolic only of their flawed,

fallen condition (Stachniewski 235). The introduction evokes religious allegory and the morality tradition, where characters embody "personified abstractions and moral or social types" and take part in "stock situations […] and themes" that dramatize contemporary social and religious concerns (Salingar 209). Some critics have read *The Revenger's Tragedy* as a morality play and others have deemed the play too subversive to easily fit this category.[36] Scott McMillin suggests that "a morality play lurks as a paradigm in Vindice's memory […]" and perhaps this is true, as from the outset he narrates his mission and the premise of the action within a morality framework, but the subsequent events of the play are too complex for any meaningful resolution, and end up beyond the control of the narrator (McMillin "Acting and Violence" 278). The play's strongest link with the morality tradition is that Vindice rallies against the "eternally problematic types of human corruption rather than the specific foibles of one court" (Kelly 22). Vindice's concern over the Duke's line of descent is largely figurative and the whole court is implicated in the Duke's immorality, for it is inheritance itself that is corrupted, polluted and irredeemable in *The Revenger's Tragedy.*

The reverence for patrilineal succession, and desire for continuity with the past that we have seen in other revenge narratives is not only missing but overturned in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Father-son inheritance, which is mourned so intensely by Thyestes, Hieronimo, and Titus, is an emblem of corruption in the case of the Duke, and a mere afterthought for Vindice who has no children to protect, and no lasting obligations to his father. Vindice says his father "had his tongue, yet grief made him die speechless" which perhaps foreshadows both the violence he is about to commit upon the Duke, and his predecessors in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Hamlet* (III. v. 169). Hieronimo bites out his tongue once he has expressed the justice he sought for his son, and Hamlet is preoccupied with the lasting voice of his dead father. In contrast, the articulation of revenge is Vindice's downfall in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, where Vindice's bequest of his story is rejected by Antonio, and the influence of Vindice's father is virtually "speechless" throughout. Familial, and particularly parent-child relationships are frequently morally

[36] For more on this theme, see L. G. Salingar "The Revenger's Tragedy and The Morality Tradition" in *Elizabethan Drama* (1978), Jonathan Dollimore "The Revenger's Tragedy: Providence, Parody and Black Camp" in *Revenge Tragedy* (2001), and Erin E. Kelly "Vindice and the Vice of Revenge: The Revenger's Tragedy and the Morality Play Tradition" in *The Revenger's Tragedy: The State of Play* (2018).

bankrupt and incestuous in the play and Vindice describes the extent of the corruption and insatiability in terms of drunkenness:

> Drunken procreation, which begets so many drunkards!
> Some father dreads not (gone to bed in wine)
> To slide from the mother, and cling the daughter-in-law,
> Some uncles are adulterous with their nieces,
> Brothers with brothers' wives. Oh, hour of incest! (I. iii. 57-61).

Vindice's obsession with sexual corruption is self-evidently bound up with his rejection of inheritance and is suggestive of the Calvinist teaching of "total depravity" and original sin (Stachniewski 233). Heather Hirschfield aligns this with contemporary religious emphasis on the doctrine of original sin and suggests that when Vindice diverts from his declared agenda of revenge to test the virtue of his mother and sister, he seeks to free himself from the innate impurity of natural inheritance (Hirschfeld "Original Sin and the Allures of Vengeance" 201; 03). Hirschfield asserts that in adopting the "self-begotten and self-anointed" alter-ego of Piato, Vindice seeks to distance himself from the "depravity […] begotten by parents" (Hirschfeld "Original Sin and the Allures of Vengeance" 204). Contemporary Puritan fervency surrounding original sin and the Fall, and a renewed emphasis on the innate sinfulness of humankind can be detected in Vindice's distain for inheritance, paternity, maternity and conception, where all progeny is "begot in evil" (I. iii. 59). We see more evidence of this distain in Vindice's interrogation of his mother, but this is something I shall discuss later in the chapter. In this sense, the claims of the past, of heritage and legacy, are not just forgotten, but rejected in *The Revenger's Tragedy.*

This rejection of the linear adds to the chaotic feel of the play. In "Providence, Parody and Black Camp" Jonathan Dollimore claims *The Revenger's Tragedy* ultimately embodies "dissolution" and "the sense of helpless movement and the lack of purpose" (Dollimore 114). The play inherits many of the stock elements of revenge plots (retribution, injustice, heirs, legitimacy) but it does not provide any coherent sense of balance or continuity. The irony of revenge narratives is in the fact that the protagonists almost always seek to restore a sense of equilibrium into an unfair world and yet inevitably end up perpetuating an imbalance, but *The Revenger's Tragedy* follows a less linear trajectory. Vindice seeks revenge mostly for Gloriana, but also nominally for his father; he seeks to cleanse the Duke's family but ends up putting his own on trial. In highlighting

the conflicting motives and intentions of the protagonist(s), *The Revenger's Tragedy* parodies the traditional aspiration to restore balance and continuity in a "world of dislocated energy" that cannot possibly result in a cohesive conclusion (Dollimore 116). The characters of *The Revenger's Tragedy* may demonstrate an acute, metatheatrical awareness of their precedents, but they refuse to heed them:

> There is one view of the characters in this play which sees them as morality type abstractions [Lust, Pride, Greed] But their subhumanity indicates more: displaying considerable desire, some intelligence but little self-awareness, they fit this play's depiction of life lived obsessively and destructively within the dislocated social 'minute' (Dollimore 115).

Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy* refuses to explain his motives in a world that is no longer listening, and Hamlet wishes his story to be re-told, but Vindice does not incorporate any of these lessons – he indulges in admission of his crimes but is condemned for them and sent to "speedy execution" (V. iii. 101). The characters are distanced from the greater narrative, each enacting their own revenge and an endless cycle of death and misery. The sexual energy of the play is bound up in inheritance but is essentially futile as the characters act in isolation, in a jumble and in various directions. It is interesting to note that, rather like in *Richard III*, the word "myself" is used twenty-six times throughout the play, as characters reflect inwards on themselves and fail to relate to the world around them. While there is a preoccupation with inheritance in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, the focus is on how corruption is spread, from father to son, from mother to daughter, and even more pervasively, through incest, deceit and sexual incontinence. There is no incorporation of the past in the world of the court, only a stunted cycle of revenge that bears no promise of peace or restoration. This is nicely encapsulated in Spurio's articulation of his revenge against the Duke, where he envisions paying back the Duke in kind for the adultery that resulted in his birth by sleeping with his stepmother: "Ay, there's the vengeance that my birth was wrapp'd in; / I'll be reveng'd for all. Now hate begin / I'll call foul incest but a venial sin" (I. ii.167-9). Spurio considers his disinheriting a "vengeance" that must be repaid, but the play also questions whether a legitimate form of inheritance is achievable. He embraces the proverbial understanding that "a bastard by nature should make cuckolds, / Because he is the son of a cuckold-maker" but feels he must be "revenge'd for all" by revisiting the sin on his father and (substitute) mother (I. ii. 200-1; 190). This is reminiscent of Dollimore's description of the

court as "'this luxurious circle' […] a closed world where energy feeds back on itself, perpetuating the 'unnatural' act in unnatural surroundings (Dollimore 111).

The closed-circle and anti-linearity of the court is highlighted in the Duke's unnatural behaviour, which is likened to both a child and a young man "angry, eager, violent" and, of course, lustful (I. i. 35). There is a strong suggestion that the polluted atmosphere of the court stems from the Duke's unnatural "heat" in age. I would suggest that this is symbolic of the play's rejection of natural succession and procreation, where the Duke unnaturally retains the sexual virility that should be inherited by the next generation. There are several references to the Duke's heat in desire, lust, rage and recklessness. This is presented in contrast to the cold chastity so revered of Antonio and Antonio's dead wife "as cold in lust as she is now in death" (I. iv. 35).

> And in my old days am a youth in lust:
> Many a beauty have I turn'd to poison
> In the denial, covetous of all.
> Age hot is like a monster to be seen:
> My hairs are white, and yet my sins are green (ii. iii. 128-32).

Reginald A. Foakes points out that "green" in this context can be understood to mean "young and fresh" (Foakes 79). Humoral theory considered overheating to be symptomatic of an unnatural excess of blood (a sanguine demeanour was associated with flushing and amorousness) or an imbalance of yellow bile (a choleric bearing associated with overheating and vengefulness) (Wood 21). Along with immoral inferences of lust and vengefulness, heat also had associations with fertility; the body was believed to require additional heat to "stimulate the sexual organs" enough for conception, a routine thought to decline with age (Bitomsky 293). The Duke describes his own propensity to lust as an "unnatural" reversal of roles, he maintains the "vital heat" considered essential for conception and is consequently fertile beyond his time, a cause of great concern to Vindice who seeks to stop his biological line (Evans 82). Yet, the anti-linearity of sexuality and inheritance in the play demonstrates the impossibility of Vindice extinguishing the "heat" of the Duke. It is intimated that the Duke's adultery goes beyond Gloriana, and in their "hour of incest" the Duke, the Duchess, Lussurioso and Spurio are channelling their lust and perpetuating sin in unnatural directions.

As Anthony Ellis points out in *Old Age, Masculinity, and Early Modern Drama,* while young men were considered "prone to incontinency, boldness and inconstancy", as the (particularly male) body aged it became "colder and drier", more passive and static (Ellis 17). Vindice expresses his bewilderment and fascination with this "grey-haired" lecher, whose fertility should have expired long ago ("spendthrift", "parched", "juiceless") but continues to pursue sexual encounters recklessly and indiscriminately:

> […] O, that marrowless age
> Would stuff the hollow bones with damned desires,
> And 'stead of heat kindle internal fires
> Within the spendthrift veins of a dry duke,
> A parched and juiceless luxur. O God! One
> That scarce has blood enough to live upon,
> And he to riot like a son and heir? (I. i. 1; 5-11).

By "marrowless age", Middleton refers to the baseness of the court, an environment "lacking substance, essence, or spirit" ("Marrowless, Adj.1"). In his descriptions of "hollow bones" and "spendthrift veins", Vindice muses on a vacuous court, an "inwardness" that contains no soul. If the Duke is presented as unnaturally "hot" and lecherous in the play, Antonio is presented as his counterpart, Antonio's serene quasi-chastity makes him respectable in his "reverend years"; as one who has fully embraced the Calvinist understanding of "spirit" over "flesh" (V. iii. 84). He has rid his blood of the heat of youth (and the corruption of sexuality) and so does not threaten the state. It could be suggested that Antonio epitomises the ideal successor for Vindice, for where the Duke's lust cannot be measured or contained, Antonio almost certainly signifies the culmination of the biological line.

The word "age" is used repeatedly in reference to the current time but also with regard to propriety and behaviour. Like the usurper trope discussed in previous chapters, the agéd sexual predator, as represented by the Duke, presents a similar threat to the natural order. The Duke has passed on his lustful nature to his legitimate children, a propensity for corruption to his illegitimate son, and continues to disrupt and poison the court by seeking out further dalliances. Vindice laments the moral ramifications of age outside of its proper social and biological restrictions: "Age, as in gold, in lust is covetous" (I. i. 38). Anthony Ellis observes that these rules were regarded as the natural order and that "[…] descriptions of old men who fail to conform to expected behaviour patterns [were

frequently] couched in language linking them to the two other discredited groups [they either] regress[ed] to childhood, or they act[ed] like women" (Ellis 17). Consequently, old men that did not correspond with the type of "cooling" and "stasis" that was expected, were considered susceptible to (and perpetrators of) the same kind of permeating corruption as women and children. The Duchess does not consider the Duke a threat, believing him to be "an old-cool duke, […] as slack in tongue as in performance" and "age's easy slave" (I. i. 74-5; I. ii. 150). But, Vindice knows the Duke is "covetous" in desire, searching for new sexual encounters and seeking to further pollute the environment that has corrupted him.

Sexual economy: bastards and virgins

The notion of "natural" inheritance becomes corrupted multiple times over and in various directions within the court. When the Duke is surprised in his chambers by Lussurioso, who expects to find the Duchess in bed with her stepson, he laments:

> This boy that should be myself after me
> Would be myself before me, and in heat
> Of that ambition bloodily rush'd in
> Intending to depose me in my bed (II. iii. 19-22).

The conflation of the sexual and political in this scene is apparent with the Duke's fear of being "depose[d]" in his bed. The Duke believes that the political and social "natural order" of a legitimate son taking the place of the father has been undermined by Lussurioso, who, like the sons of Gorboduc, wishes to rush "in heat of ambition" into that place before his time. The term "rush'd in" is doubly employed here to reflect the manner of Lussurioso's entrance, but also the premature nature of his desire for the throne and the phrase "heat of ambition" echoes Vindice's earlier condemnation of the Duke's lustful heat. This doubling of power and sex is pervasive in *The Revenger's Tragedy.* However, it is, of course, Spurio who wishes to usurp the Duke's bed, and while his intentions are more personal than political, this power/sex doubling is mirrored in the Duke's response. Spurio resents that he was by "haste" in "one false minute disinherited" and wishes to return this slight upon Lussurioso: "I'll disinherit you in as short time / As I was when I was begot in haste" (II. ii. 124). The word "begot" surrounds Spurio: it is frequently used by him and by others, towards him; the circumstances of his birth both determine and

consume him. In the acceptance of his “adulterous” nature, with some prompting from the Duchess, he embraces his inferior position within society and within the play. It is important to note that while the word “adultery” was used primarily in reference to “voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and another who is not his or her spouse”, it could also be used in a broader context to mean sexual debauchery, or the debasement or corruption of character ("Adultery, N."). Consequently, Spurio does not only seek to “cuckold” the Duke in committing incest with the Duchess, but also to disinherit Lussurioso and create political chaos within the court.

The audience are given a certain set of expectations of Spurio from the very start of the play; he is introduced by Vindice as the Duke’s “bastard, true-begot in evil”, and, though he is not named until the second act, Spurio means both “illegitimate” and “false” in Italian (I. i. 3; "Spurious, Adj."). Yet, unlike Edmund, the bastard son of Gloucester in *King Lear*, or even quasi-bastard son of the Yorkists, Richard III, Spurio does not seek to disrupt the patriarchal order to obtain power; he simply seeks to return the sense of pollution and adultery that has been visited on him. We first see Spurio lurking around the court, speaking in asides, at the trial of his younger, legitimate, brother for rape. As we might expect, he is impatient for the Junior Brother to be sentenced to death; however, this is not in an attempt to advance his place in the royal line, but part of a broader desire to see the court in ruins:

> And if a bastard’s wish might stand in force,
> Would all the court were turned into a corse (I. ii. 35-6).

The bastard in early modern society was not considered to wholly “belong” anywhere; Spurio is suspended between two worlds, the legitimate and the illegitimate, the royal and the provincial, the mother and the father. As Findlay suggests “The relative anonymity of bastards mark[ed] them off as essentially ‘other’ rather than socially integrated” (Findlay 21). The Duchess attempts to utilise Spurio’s sense of “otherness” to see her revenge against the Duke materialise. She prompts his anger over his displacement in the family and in the royal line:

> For had he cut thee a right diamond,
> Thou hadst been next set in the Dukedom’s ring,
> When his worn self, like age’s easy slave,
> Had dropped out of the collet into th’ grave.

What wrong can equal this? (I. ii. 149-53).

Her metaphors are framed in economic terms, Spurio would have been the next figurehead of the kingdom, or diamond in the ring, when age wore the old one out.

> Who would not be revenged of such a father,
> E'en in the worst way? I would thank that sin
> That could most injury him, and be in league with it.
> O' what a grief 'tis that a man should live
> But once I' th' world, and then to live a bastard,
> The curse o' the womb, the thief of nature,
> Begot against the seventh commandment,
> Half damned in the conception, by the justice
> Of that unbribed everlasting law (I. ii. 154-62).

The Duchess intends to inflame Spurio's anger at the limited existence a bastard is allotted in Renaissance society. In *Illegitimate Power: Bastards in Renaissance Drama*, Alison Findlay confirms that: "the bastard, with no paternal stamp – no verbal connection to society – is outside the official discourse and thus ultimately uncontrollable" (Findlay 21). Doomed to live as illegitimate, counterfeit, unclaimed, the bastard was marginalised in good society. We see this in Spurio's numerous asides: apart from the Duchess, who has her own motives, very few of the other characters engage with him. Spurio is the embodiment of transgression, the "curse o' the womb, the thief of nature": one that should not have existed. The Duchess' choice of words in "the curse o' the' womb" and as a "thief of nature" are reminiscent of several of the plays we have discussed previously. Like Spurio, Richard III's quasi-bastard status causes him to consider himself an outsider from his conception: "the slander of [his] mother's heavy womb" (I. iii. 225-29). Here we see the imagery of Spurio as a pestilence on those around him, those who would rather forget his existence. In this distorted image of pregnancy, similar to those present in *Thyestes*, Spurio compounds the various tropes of desire, greed and insatiability that resulted in his birth, claiming to feel the anger and injustice of his origins "swell" within him:

> O, damnation met
> The sin of feasts, drunken adultery.
> I feel it swell me. My revenge is just;
> I was begot in impudent wine and lust (I. ii. 187-90).

The Duchess insinuates that like his classical precedents in Seneca, due to pre-existing sin, Spurio has inherited a blighted existence that will bring misery to all those around him. Having been conceived in excess, "begot in impudent wine and lust" and "against the seventh commandment", Spurio accepts adultery as his "nature" (I. ii. 177). Yet, as Findlay points out, having the Duchess quote scripture immediately brings its legitimacy into question (Findlay 45). I would also suggest that if we are to believe Vindice's perspective, the descriptions of Spurio's conception are not very different to any of the other sexual liaisons at court, where "Drunken procreation, which begets so many drunkards!" (I. iii. 57). While it is true that early modern society would have regarded bastards to be created in sin, and therefore questionable in nature, it is significant that Middleton chooses to ascribe this moralising to the Duchess, who is, of course, unscrupulously using its power as licence for her own sinful behaviour. This hypocrisy implies that Spurio's sinful beginnings might not divide him from the "legitimate" family unit as much as he believes. She advises Spurio to avenge himself upon his father, to embrace the most impactful (and appropriate) act of revenge and "be in league with it" (I. ii. 156). This advice resonates with the convention of revengers coming to embody the sin they wish to punish, and of course *maius nefas,* for as Spurio is already representative of adultery and excess, he must outstrip his father and commit "foul incest" (I. ii. 9). There are many references to the brief time it took to commit the sin of his birth, and the long-lasting effect on the life of a child. Spurio is "by one false minute disinherited" and forevermore doomed to damnation (I. ii. 166). In copulating with his stepmother, he not only seeks to offend the Duke, but illustratively return to his origins to re-create a "natural" self. In sexual union with the legitimate wife of his father, Spurio retroactively attempts to legitimise his birth and expunge his guilt.

However, we are not given any indication that such a legitimacy is possible: bastardy and incest are presented as just some of the many sexual sins entrenched in the world of the play. Even virtuous characters such as Castiza are presented in terms of their corruptibility. Vindice's alter-ego Piato is a "man o' th' time" in the sense that he is a bastard, he is "sent whole / into the world" without lineage or parentage and sets about wilfully wreaking havoc, exposing corruption, while participating in it (I. iii. 2-3). Where Richard III feels aggrieved in having been denied his lineage, sent "into this breathing world, scarce half made up", Piato revels in the freedom it brings (*Richard III*. 1. 1. 21).

Thomas P Anderson notes how the “patrimonies washed a-pieces” Piato describes having witnessed “is an expression of the play’s deepest anxiety”:

> “By turn[ing] into bastards” as Vindice-Piato’s cynical observation suggests, patrimony loses the wealth of its own history and ceases to function as a link between the past and the present (I. iii. 50-1; Anderson 161).

Due to the bastard’s significance for the line of patrilineal descent, theatrical illegitimates were almost exclusively male in the period. Michael Neill asserts that “anxieties surrounding bastardy had a great deal to do with its disruption of the proper line of paternity through the creation of a child that could only be defined as its mother's” (Neill "Bastardy, Counterfeiting, and Misogyny" 398). Mothers were, to a greater extent, held responsible for the sins of illegitimate children. This was likely due to the increased visibility of unmarried motherhood and the fact that paternity was a, much disputed, matter of trust in the period (“women must not be trusted with their own”) (I. iii. 289). There was intense scrutiny surrounding female infidelity and the possibility that ostensibly legitimate children may be undisclosed bastards, a prospect which “threatened to undermine the genealogical myths on which Renaissance power relied” (Findlay 2). Michael Neill points out that the economic value of the illegitimate son was a theme revisited throughout the period. As one threatening the “true-begot” line of inheritance, the bastard son was compared to a counterfeit coin, passable by outward appearances but inherently worthless; and more importantly, a potentially dangerous interloper. Neill confirms that the bastard was seen to be polluting the "pure" blood of legitimate descent; and it was interpreted as a form of genealogical counterfeiting because it threatened to displace the "true" heir with a "false" and debased substitute” (Neill "Bastardy, Counterfeiting, and Misogyny" 399).

Yet the anxieties surrounding concealed immorality in bastard sons were similar to those concerning unchaste daughters. In the exchanges between Vindice, Gratiana and Castiza we see the intrinsic value of a woman repeatedly reduced to her demonstrable virginity. Castiza must demonstrate that she is “incorruptible” – unlike the bastard son, representative of insatiability and instability, that threatens the state – the virginal daughter is able to restrain political and economic threat through control of her sexuality. In a similar way to Lavinia’s loss in *Titus Andronicus*, Castiza’s virginity is

represented in terms of a fortress that must be defended; she keeps all potential interlopers at a distance to retain her value. When she rejects Vindice/Piato's advances on behalf of Lussurioso with a slap she says: "I swore I'd put anger in my hand, / And pass the virgin limits of my self, / To him that next appeared in that base office, / To be his sin's attorney" (II. i. 31-4). It would seem that Castiza passes the "virgin limits" of herself when she makes contact with Piato to "box" his ear. Virginity is considered "untouchable" and to mar it in physicality reduces its value. The use of the hot/lustful and cold/chaste dynamic reinforces this. The "hot" figure of Castiza's "hate" in contact with Lussurioso's "attorney" is evidently more ignoble than cold, virginal indifference (II. i. 35-6).

In his role as seducer, Vindice moves on to Gratiana, indulging in lustful innuendo, mercenary metaphors and incestuous implications. Playfully highlighting the lack of inherent value in virginity ("Tut, one would let a little of that go, too, / And n'er be seen in't, mark you / I'd wink and let it go") Vindice stresses that the time has come for Castiza to earn her keep:

> If you'd that blood now which you gave to your daughter.
> To her indeed 'tis, this wheel comes about;
> That man that must be all this, perhaps ere morning
> (for his white father does but mould away)
> Has long desired your daughter (II. i. 64-6; 68-72).

The metaphors of time, of the "wheel [that] comes about" highlights the themes of inheritance. Vindice is implying that Gratiana gave up her inherent value, the "blood" and "heat" of youth and sexual desirability, for Castiza, who now must be expected to repay her debt. He highlights the passing of time in the daughter acquiring the responsibilities of the mother and the son inheriting the father's. His description of the Duke as the "white father" that does but "mould away" is in stark contrast to Vindice's opening comments on the Duke as notoriously "hot and vicious" in age and emphasises the anti-linearity of the "heat" of the Duke that threatens to usurp his son (I. i. 37). He seemingly uses his earlier aphorism, "Age, as in gold, in lust is covetous", to measure how Gratiana's base impulses might mirror the Duke's (I. i. 38).

Vindice attempts to practically appeal to Gratiana's poverty, and revels in sexual language as he describes how Castiza should repay her birth-debt through prostitution:

I would raise my state upon her breast,
And call her eyes my tenants; I would count
My yearly maintenance on her cheeks,
Take coach upon her lip; and all her parts
Should keep men after men, and I would ride
In pleasure upon pleasure.
You took great pains for her, once when it was;
Let her requite it now, though it be but some.
You brought her forth; she may well bring you home (II. i. 93-101).

The indulgent, overtly-sexual and quasi-incestuous undertones of this speech are compounded by Gratiana's response of "O heavens! This overcomes me!" (I. ii. 102). Vindice enters into an exchange with Gratiana that mirrors both Christian understanding of temptation by the devil and that of a lover appealing to a chaste maid, persuading Gratiana to surrender her morality, integrity and "natural" motherhood in pursuit of wealth and luxury. The rhetorical device that finally appears to convince Gratiana "You brought her forth; she may well bring you home" accentuates the use of sexuality within the commodities market. The debt that Vindice argues Castiza inherited at her birth when her value eclipsed her mother's, bears striking resemblances to the revenge debt Vindice feels he must repay.

This is interesting with regards to the play's view of age; "the age" and "the time" are frequently referred to as corrupt and base, but the play also repeatedly associates age with moral and physical degeneration and devaluation. There is no wisdom in age in *The Revenger's Tragedy,* only increased vulnerability to corruption. It is not only Gratiana's gender that paces her at risk of corruption, it is also her age: "the name [bawd] / Is so in league with age, that nowadays / It does eclipse three quarters of a mother" (I. iii. 152-4). Vindice's persuasive rhetoric is bound up with imagery that casts Castiza as the usurper of her mother's value, thief of her youth and vigour. Vindice highlights the injustice of Gratiana's powerless position; the mother's sexual and economic value has been lost to the child and consequently Castiza's virginity is Gratiana's only commodity: "the daughter's fall lifts up the mother's head" (II. i. 113). This is an interesting inversion of revenge tragedy tropes, for where plays like *The Spanish Tragedy* bewail the injustice of a father's lost son, an inheritor gone before his time ("myself after me"), *The Revenger's Tragedy* explores the dynamics of power and sacrifice between a mother and daughter. Gratiana, with some encouragement from Vindice, resents this loss of significance and

transfer of power. Gratiana is a widow with little power and a “poor estate”; all she has is invested in Castiza and she is convinced by Vindice, that “this wheel [*should*] come about”, returning her to the social, sexual, and economic significance she once enjoyed (II. i. 69). In this sense she is twice unnatural, once in her motherly duties and another in her desire to revert time and circumstance.

As Jennifer Panek points out in “The Mother as Bawd”, there is a “temptation to see Gratiana’s behaviour as the moral failings of an individual” when comparing the mother with the “steadfastly virtuous” daughter, but it is clear that:

> […] the play invites the audience to consider Gratiana less as an individual than specifically as a mother, working with cultural notions of what it means to be a "natural" or "unnatural" mother, and exploiting fears about the way in which a daughter's bestowal may be disordered in the absence of both the father and his surrogate protector, the daughter's portion, or patrimony (Panek 422).

The absence of the father is crucial in the circumstance of Gratiana and Castiza; Castiza cannot marry as the “dowry of her blood and fortunes / are both too mean” and, in the absence of alternative income, Gratiana attempts to persuade her daughter to surrender her virginity to Lussurioso in the hope that they can both “live wealthy” and “rightly understand the world” (I. iii. 100-1; II. i. 79). Vindice persuades Gratiana that, as a single woman, she is naïve to the reality of the world which all around them “descends into such base-born evils / That forty angels can make fourscore devils” (II. i. 86-7). Vindice paints a picture of a busy, utilitarian marketplace and thriving commonwealth, where one must trade in what one possesses and source requirements likewise. Only chastity is left “a-cold”, isolated and disadvantaged: “And what woman is so foolish to keep honesty / And be not able to keep herself?” (II. i. 222; 179-80). Eager to stay afloat in this new, pragmatic and mercenary world, Gratiana encourages her daughter: “Come, you shall leave those childish ‘haviours, / And understand your time” but Castiza does not recognise this image of a world “so changed, one shape into another” and refuses her mother’s entreaties (II. i. 165-6; 161).

Gratiana emphasises how it “twas decreed that man should keep the key” to a woman’s body, but it is also made clear how morality, society and commerce are also accessed and appropriated through male suitors or relatives (II. i. 154). Frances E. Dolan

comments on how in early modern understandings “the woman who outlives her husband is still identified in relation to him as his leavings” (Dolan 214). Gratiana suffers from this social problem; she embodies an unclaimed surplus and attempts to reinstate her value in the world through Castiza. Sexual integrity and economic practice are frequently linked throughout the play. Disguised as Piato, Vindice gleefully claims to have been witness to “the surrenders of a thousand virgins” of “patrimonies washed a-pieces [and] fruit fields turned into bastards” (I. iii. 49-51). Where Vindice bemoans the “unnatural” times, where destruction of biological and economic inheritance is brought about by greed and insatiability, Piato frames it as a sexual and economic opportunity.

Sins of the mothers: permeability and the transmission of sin

As we have discussed, for Vindice, the corruption that must be “purged” from the Italian court is largely sexual, and Vindice’s anger at the Duke’s sexual degradation is partially vented in his testing of the integrity of the other characters. The responsibility for upkeeping sexual integrity is largely placed on women; though the play does explore in detail the decadence of lust in the Duke and Lussurioso, the role of women’s bodies as sexual arbiters is repeatedly foregrounded. In *The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution,* Faramerz Dabhoiwala affirms how control on sexual behaviour had become increasingly strict towards the end of the sixteenth and start of the seventeenth century, confirming how “sex was central to the Reformation’s reshaping of the world” as Protestantism moved further towards Puritanism (Dabhoiwala 12). Due to “the ever-further purification of society”, anxieties were heightened around sexual disease and immorality, and in particular, the degeneration of the ruling classes (Dabhoiwala 14-15). As Bernard Capp explains, these rules usually applied equally to men and women for Protestant preachers and conduct books “insisted that adultery was a weighty sin in either sex” (Capp 162).

However, while the moral law may have been equally stringent, within society the consequences for female lust were far greater. And the “weighty” responsibility of the recipient of sexual impropriety appears a wholly female affair in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*. Much time is dedicated to the steadfastness of Gloriana, Castiza and Antonio’s wife in their refusal of sexual desire, but far less is devoted to Spurio’s succumbing to the Duchess’ advances. I would suggest that this is related to the woman’s role as host in

The Revenger's Tragedy, of sexuality, of family and of inheritance. We see how those early allusions in *Thyestes*, that connected motherhood and pregnancy with the natural, the miraculous and the divine are entirely absent in *The Revenger's Tragedy,* and in line with Calvinist doctrine, have been replaced with a stronger emphasis on Eve, sexual transgression, and original sin. Concern about female corruptibility, permeability, and vulnerability to penetration (figuratively and literally), is revisited over and over again in the text, for "[j]ust as female porousness is always prone to release what should be contained, so it is liable to admit what should be excluded" (Neill "Bastardy, Counterfeiting, and Misogyny" 407).

Critics have debated the significance of the many misogynist epithets espoused by Vindice and noted the discomfort of a modern audience in hearing lines such as "Wives are but made to go to bed and feed" (I. i. 129-32). There are misogynist tropes aplenty in the text with women being described as vain, untrustworthy, penetrable and leaky. Critics have consistently identified misogyny as a pervading theme of the play, and one which drives the plot, with the attention given to virginity, bastardy, cuckoldry, and "unnatural mothers" all contributing to this "misogynistic social vision" (Neill "Bastardy, Counterfeiting, and Misogyny" 398). Mullaney aligns *The Revenger's Tragedy* with a "resurgent political misogyny of Elizabeth's court in the 1590s" that "coincided with a dramatic increase, as it were, of misogyny on-stage; in the years after her death" (Mullaney "Mourning and Misogyny" 142). It is certainly easy to find evidence supporting the view of *The Revenger's Tragedy* as the "epitome of early modern misogyny", but some critics have also suggested that the flagrant sexism may be a red herring, believing that in "In the sordid world of the play […] Middleton presents men as more morally culpable" (Lanier 236; Ross-Kilroy 62). This may be consistent with the tone of the rest of the text, for while there is certainly a misogynistic commentary running throughout *The Revenger's Tragedy*, its parodic and satiric style makes it contestable whether or not the audience were expected to subscribe to or to scrutinise such views.

In his early speech about lust as the scourge of the times ("O Dutch lust! fulsome lust!"), Vindice refers exclusively to the degradation of males (fathers/sons/brothers/uncles) but his attention is quickly diverted to testing the virtue of his female relatives (I. iii. 56). It is important to note that almost every character within

The Revenger's Tragedy is tainted with immorality in one way or another, including the avenging protagonist, who more frequently invites scepticism than sympathy, and crucially, while these sins are gendered, they occur equally between the male and female characters. The most obvious example of this is in Vindice's commentary on how women demonstrate a concerning lack of control, especially with words. He supports his father's "wise" decision not to trust Gratiana "with his thoughts" and confirms with Lussurioso that if he were to "Tell but some woman a secret overnight, / Your doctor may find it in the urinal i' th' morning (I. i. 130; I. iii. 82-3). Katherine Eisaman Maus suggests that "Vindice connects female unreliability with the perilous 'openness' of the female anatomy, its susceptibility to invasion through its apertures" (Maus xix). However, we know it is eventually Vindice who "bring[s] forth himself" in ill-advised confession at the end of the play (V. i. 158). Celia Daileader suggests that *The Revenger's Tragedy* actively seeks to redress the balance in these types of gendered behaviours, identifying "[i]ncontinence – whether verbal, biological, or sexual" as the overarching sin of the play, which may be attributed to females in the dialogue, but is consistently exhibited in the actions of the males (Daileader 458). It is the Duke who can "not be contained [and] must fly out" and Vindice who cannot keep his silence (I. i. 84). Daileader notes that in *The Revenger's Tragedy* "almost every male character bears the name of a vice or defect" with the only virtuous characters being female and concludes that "Middleton is more interested in – and more vexed by – specifically masculine [sexual] frailty or misbehaviour" (Daileader 452).

While it is true that the only uncontested virtue of the play is represented by women (Castiza, Gloriana, Antonio's wife),[37] these women are all untouchable, either in perpetual virginity or in death. One of the most famous images from the play, is Vindice holding the skull of Gloriana. Of course, the most obvious precursor to this is Hamlet with the skull of Yorick, but we must also acknowledge the connections with Hieronimo and the bloody handkerchief. The significance of Gloriana's skull falls somewhere between these two plays: she certainly figures as a *memento mori*, and signifies Vindice's problematic relationship with the past, but she is also a call to action, a justification and

[37] Antonio could of course be included on this list, but perhaps his pragmatic dispatching of Vindice and Hippolito to execution, indicates that Antonio is more a "man o' th' time" than Vindice initially supposes.

a cause.[38] The skull is a symbol of both inertia and dynamism, most evident of course when Vindice poisons the Duke from the mouth of the "bony lady" (III. v. 121). Gloriana's is the cause with which Vindice opens his case as avenger, and we recognise the structure of this plot from the traditional revenge narrative, but it is significant that her name is mentioned only once in the text (by contrast, Hamlet speaks of his murdered father over twenty times and Hieronimo references his dead son Horatio over thirty times in *The Spanish Tragedy*). Vindice refers to her by other names ("poisoned love", "betrothed lady") but we hear very little about Gloriana; we do not hear the Duke confess to her murder, and in avenging her death Vindice is not satiated (I. i. 14;16). This reinforces the function of Gloriana as a symbol in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. In the style of excess, other revenge plots collide with Gloriana's, most noticeably, the testing of Gratiana and Castiza. Vindice originally becomes involved in the wooing of his sister in an attempt to gain access to the Duke via his son, Lussurioso, but many have commented on Vindice's readiness to participate in this scheme as an excuse to engage in pursuit of the "truth", about sexual integrity, about interiority, and about a woman's role in maintaining these boundaries.

The shadow of Gloriana looms large over the whole plot for she is the ideal to whom Vindice's mother and sister cannot possibly compare. She rebuffed the Duke's advances and was consequently poisoned for her resistance; in this sense, she is the chaste-ideal – like the drowned Ophelia – she is revered in death, with virtue beyond all mortal women. In life, we are told, Gloriana was "So far beyond the artificial shine / Of any woman's bought complexion" and in death, Vindice affirms she will be forever so (I. i. 21-2). As the Duke's lasciviousness is equated with heat, we see in Gloriana (along with Castiza and Antonio's wife) the linguistic conflation of "cold" with "chastity"; where the coldness of death represents the ultimate form of purity ("All thrives but chastity; she lies a-cold"; "cold and chaste") (II. i. 222; II. ii. 55). Steven Mullaney contends that while "the only good woman may be a dead woman in *Hamlet*, […] *The Revenger's Tragedy*

[38] It is interesting to note here that "Gloriana" was a name frequently used in reference to Elizabeth I. This has implications for how *The Revenger's Tragedy* uses Gloriana as a symbol of virginal perfection, a "lost Eden", who even in death, requires protection from the "corruption" of the times (Walsh 6). More information on this can be found in Peter Hyland's essay "Re-membering Gloriana: *The Revenger's Tragedy*" in *Resurrecting Elizabeth I in Seventeenth-century England* (2007).

does not even offer this posthumous recovery" (Mullaney "Mourning and Misogyny" 161). We can observe this sentiment in the manner of Vindice's by proxy revenge, for even though Gloriana died chaste, he submits her as an object of lust for the Duke, essentially prostituting her. Aimee Ross-Kilroy points out how easy it is to "read this scene, and indeed this play, as the epitome of early modern misogyny":

> The woman here is an androgynous skull, held like a puppet by a man, wearing a female costume to revenge its own death - speechless, mute, and indifferent to its fate (Ross-Kilroy 62).

In subjecting Gloriana to being "entered by the duke's tongue as he kisses her" she is violated in the manner she had given her life to avoid (Mullaney "Mourning and Misogyny" 161). Vindice appears enamoured by the prospect of the revenge plot's "payment in kind": to have the Duke poisoned by the skull of the woman he contaminated is too enticing to resist. Like in so many other ways, Vindice rushes ahead of his predecessor in this respect:

> [W]hile Hamlet agonizes over his revenge plot, Vindice gleefully embraces the role of revenger, extending the Duke's death and marking the torture with jokes about mouths and tongues. Like Hamlet, Vindice finds it crucial to "match the word to the action, the action to the word" in his theatre of revenge, taking devilish glee in aligning crime and punishment for his victims (Ross-Kilroy 53).

In this sense, he is more like Atreus, than Hamlet, another avenger who revelled in the appropriate consuming/consumed nature of his revenge. The "violence of [Vindice's] joy" and his "happy apprehensions" evidently lie in the appropriate nature of the revenge where "The mortal curse of the earth, shall be revenged / In the like strain, and kiss his lips to death" (III. v. 103-4).

However, Middleton makes it clear that Vindice is falling into the age-old trap of becoming the trespasser he seeks to condemn. While Vindice appears to overlook the fact Gloriana died to avert penetration by the Duke, this is made apparent to the audience in the spectacle of Vindice gilding her remains and in his descriptions of her. Vindice desires the skull to "bear a part / E'en in it own revenge" but it is evident that he is posthumously prostituting Gloriana:

> [*to the skull*] Hide thy face now for shame; thou hadst need have a mask now.
> [*Vindice puts the mask back on the skull*]
> 'Tis vein when beauty flows, but when it fleets,
> This would become graves better than the streets (III. v. 113-6).

Gloriana's "shame" in this situation is articulated and arguably, the allusion to the "streets" relates to prostitution. Along with Vindice's language regarding the decorated and ornamented skull, it is clear the audience are intended to feel this as violation rather than retribution. Vindice refers to the dressed skull as a "quaint piece of beauty", bawdily describing how "Age and bare bone / Are e'er allied in action" (III. v. 52-4). Katherine Eisaman Maus notes in her edition of the text how "quaint" was a frequently used innuendo to describe female genitalia, and how the use of "action" in this context likely referred to intercourse (Maus 365). Maus also points out the contemporary significance of Vindice's reference to the mask in these lines, referring to the great number of Renaissance moralists who "deplore[d] women's use of masks on the grounds that they excite male desire" (Maus 366). In this, Vindice confirms that, in life, Gloriana's beauty had no need for the "vanity" of masks. Vindice's compromising of Gloriana in this scene is interesting as it appears relevant in relation to some of the ambiguity in his speech towards her.

Musing on the unadorned nature of the skull, Vindice appears to take pleasure in heaping sexual vices onto Gloriana posthumously; with his perception of a woman's ability to "beguile" and "bewitch", it comes to represent the sins of womankind (III. v. 51;74).

> Does every proud and self-affecting dame
> Camphor her face for this? And grieve her Maker
> In sinful baths of milk, when many an infant starves,
> For her superfluous outside – all for this?
> Who now bids twenty pound a night, prepares
> Music, perfumes, and sweetmeats? All are hushed;
> Thou may'st lie chaste now […]
> […] See, ladies, with false forms
> You deceive men, but cannot deceive worms (III. v. 83-9; 96-7).

Gabriel Rieger argues that, for Vindice, Gloriana "is the perfect woman, entirely beyond the reach of both sinful vanity and physical corruption […] She is not corrupt because she is not human. In becoming less human (dead) physically, she has become more than

human morally" (Rieger). Here, we return to Calvinist ideas about the innate corruption of humanity, where the only achievable morality is in death. Alongside Vindice's admiration of the still, silent, virtue of Gloriana in this scene is his appreciation of her transparency. He stares inside the eye sockets of the skull, inside the cavernous mouth of bare bone and appreciates the lack of artifice, comparing her favourably to those living women who "deceive men" with "false forms". The play consistently returns to themes of "inwardness" and disguise, Vindice disguises himself to learn the inner thoughts of those around him (the Duke, Lussurioso, Gratiana and Castiza) and in this scene, we are reminded that Vindice can only fully know Gloriana once she is dead, now her "inwardness" is made visible and there is nothing left for her to hide.

Vindice's preoccupation with Gloriana's appearance and façade is part of a familiar association in early modern culture, and particularly within tragic drama, that linked women's use of cosmetics with moral and sexual corruption. Shirley Nelson Garner argues that critics of cosmetics, or women's "painting", claimed that the use of products to disguise their natural appearance made women "agents of seduction and deceit [associated with] with prostitutes" (Garner 125). Many plays of the period draw on the association of "painting" and untrustworthiness, Hamlet echoes many religious moralists of the time when he equates Ophelia's make up with a type of hubristic vanity, tampering with God's creation: "God has given you one face, and you make yourselves/ Another: you jig, you amble, and you lisp, and / Nick-name God's creatures, and make your wantonness / Your ignorance" (Garner 133; III. i. 43-7). In *Antonio's Revenge,* published around the same time as Hamlet (1600-1601), Maria, mother of the eponymous hero, equates faithfulness and honesty with a lack of "art":

> So long as wives are faithful, modest, chaste,
> Wise lords affect them. Virtue doth not waste,
> With each slight flame of cracking vanity.
> A modest eye forceth affection,
> Whilst outward gayness light looks but entice.
> Fairer than nature's fair is foulest vice.
> She that loves art, to get her cheek more lovers,
> Much outward gauds, slight inward grace discovers (*AR*. I. ii. 54-61).

When Maria confirms that she "care[s] not to seem fair but to my lord" she touches upon one of the concerns surrounding women's use of cosmetics; namely, that their allure was

intended for the benefit of strangers, rather than husbands (*AR*. I. ii. 62). Cosmetics were viewed as affronts to morality, as "manifestations of women's pride" and, as such, possible indicators of a woman's propensity for sexual betrayal (Garner 125). Frequently viewed as a form of disguise, cosmetics implied a need to conceal "foulest vice" and Renaissance writers were evidently fascinated and unsettled by what form that vice may take. The most recurrent theory is plainly a sexual one. Laurie Finke claims that Vindice's preoccupation with cosmetic façade is linked with the "masculine fear of betrayal" that pervades the play, resulting in its renowned "hostility toward female sexuality" and "its reduction of all women to whores or potential whores" (Finke 359). Make up was used as a literary metaphor for women's propensity for deception, for their "fallenness and their destructive power over men" (Garner 131). Critics have noted that the fascination of early modern playwrights with women's use of cosmetics became more commonplace at the court of James I. Garner asserts that Elizabeth "encouraged directly and by her example the use of cosmetics and perfumes" among contemporary women, but perhaps once Elizabeth, emblem of virginity, was dead, it became easier to equate cosmetics with wantonness and with the Fall (Garner 132). Historians have frequently characterised the court of James I as more sexually lax, and while such an interpretation is open to debate, it is clear that sex was more "visible" at court with a more "open sexual discourse" (Rickman 100). Johanna Rickman argues that with the Elizabeth's unmarried status, the Queen's court had been publicly defined by chastity with Elizabeth herself as "the ultimate unattainable love object", but this all changed during the reign of James I (Rickman 93).

While such negative associations with "painting" were commonplace, it clearly did not deter the practice itself, for both Finke and Garner confirm that the use of cosmetics among Elizabethan and Jacobean women was widespread, even "burgeoning" in the period (Garner 131). Cosmetics came increasingly to represent sin, deception and death. Laurie Finke explains how "woman as a *memento mori* masked by a beautiful facade" became a trope in Jacobean theatre, probing at anxieties between the distinctions of the living and the dead (Finke 360). Artificial beauty became associated with death and mortality. Vindice's couplet "See, ladies, with false forms / You deceive men, but cannot deceive worms" exemplifies this connection for, as Garner attests, while "both woman and man are implicated in sexual sin" in the period it is "through woman's agency that man falls. It is she who finally comes to stand for death" (III. v. 96-7; Garner 128).

Associations of “painting” with death may also have included the poisoning qualities of mercury, often used in cosmetics of the period, which resulted in a type of “gradual decomposition” and the use of cosmetics to hide sexual diseases, such as syphilis, that eroded the skin (Finke 363). The tendency of prostitutes to “paint” to mask the sexual threat of disease combines the major anxieties relating to disguise, sexual immorality and death. Vindice’s use of Gloriana’s poisoned lips is a figurative illustration of death by sexually transmitted disease; the Duke dies in the credulous pursuit of his lust. In a period where increasingly Puritan leanings were emphasising the significance of “Eve’s curse” and of “fallen” women, cosmetics and disguise came to represent both a denial and reminder of the inevitability of death:

> Vindice’s painted skull emphasises the double sense of “painting”: as art – a changeless, timeless ideal designed to transcend death – and as cosmetics – a form of disguise and a futile attempt to cheat death (Finke 358).

The literal and symbolic “pollution” of the interior by cosmetics ties into the play’s broader themes. It returns us to the play’s obsession with “inwardness” and permeability, the notion that outward appearances may contradict inner selves, and that those inner selves are vulnerable to perforation and disintegration. The only stable interiorities in *The Revenger’s Tragedy* are the static and symbolic ones, those whom are already dead and can no longer be altered. We see how the evaluation of chastity and virginity is more moral than biological in the play. Gloriana is held as an emblem for women in her eternal abstinence and rather like Atreus with Aerope, Antonio’s wife’s virginity is restored to her after the vengeance is complete; in death, her “chaste presence” is held up as a “precedent for wives” (I. iv. 8; 7). Yet, while “the emblematic […] female body” is often a dead one in *Hamlet* and *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, we see how Vindice, notably in his disguise as Piato (“a man of the times”) manages to demonstrate how the corrupted environment can permeate even death, like the oft-employed metaphor of the worms in the grave (Coddon 132).

The dead virgins of *The Revenger’s Tragedy* mostly occupy the realm of the symbolic. We never discover the name of Antonio’s wife and Gloriana is spoken of only by Vindice; no other character references her name and we learn nothing of her family or her place within the court:

> [T]he skull's negation is also a negation of genealogy. All mention of Gloriana's family is erased from the play. The reduction of woman to skull, then, is accompanied by the reduction of familial networks. Even Gloriana's relation to Vindice, established as it is, is of a transitional kind. Never perceived as a daughter, she is not yet a wife […] This genealogical reduction, though, serves a dramatic function: it puts her outside the structures of exchange (Stallybrass 131).

It appears that the more isolated a female character, the more literally and figuratively "untouchable" she is, and consequently the more revered. Those women that have transcended the flesh and entered the realm of the symbolic are physically and emotionally beyond reach, frozen and suspended in their purity. Again, this may relate to the association of Gloriana with Elizabeth I, whose posthumous legacy of virginity and virtue had firmly taken place within the realm of the symbolic by the time *The Revenger's Tragedy* was written (indeed this reputation began long before her death), and her presence loomed large over the court of James I. It has been suggested that James and Anna's sexual union and family life created a whole new dynamic at court, one in which sexual behaviour was less covert, causing some to mourn the "purer" times of Elizabeth (Rickman 71).

Within *The Revenger's Tragedy*, it is the positioning of a woman within a marriage, within a family, within society, that increases the potential avenues for corruptibility and intensifies the ramifications of this corruption. Consequently, mothers cause the most acute anxiety in this play; they represent a dangerous combination of being a representative of the husband, an indispensable component of the family unit, and demonstrably sexually active. Their having "hosted" a child within their body only highlights their permeability and their potential infiltration. The Duchess represents the dangers of contamination within the family unit in *The Revenger's Tragedy*; as a wife and mother, the Duchess is indisputably in a position to cause the most damage should her behaviour falter, and this anxiety is played out in the text. The first speech from the Duchess places her at the heart of the family:

> DUCHESS [*kneels*] My gracious lord, I pray be merciful.
> Although his trespass far exceed his years,
> Think him to be your own, as I am yours;
> Call him not son-in-law. The law, I fear,
> Will fall too soon upon his name and him;
> Temper his fault with pity (I. ii. 21-6).

Echoing Tamora, the Duchess begs for mercy for her son; she explicitly uses her position within the family unit to entreat the Duke to pity ("Think him to be your own, as I am yours"). As his mother, she attempts to highlight a "youthful" mitigation of the crime ("his trespass far exceed his years"; "the law […] will fall too soon upon […] him"). This emphasis of his youth is supported by his reference only as the Junior Brother, his attempt to mock the court that is about to pass judgement on his life ("play not with thy death") and his response when asked what "moved" him to carry out the rape, which is steeped in both callousness and naivety: "Why, flesh and blood, my lord. / What should move men unto woman else?" (I. ii. 53; 46-8). The Junior Brother's reference to the impulses of "flesh and blood" emphasises the universality of his crime and compounds the Calvinist undercurrent of total depravity. It highlights the anxieties surrounding inherited corruption, highlighted by Vindice in the first scene, and confirmed by the Duchess' speech once she is left alone onstage. Feeling her pleas have gone unheard ("No pity yet? Must I rise fruitless then, a wonder in a woman?") she expresses her distaste for the judgement of the court ("the law, / Is grown more subtle than a woman should be") (I. ii. 37-8; 72-3). In this scene, we witness a striking change in the character of the Duchess, from kneeling gracious wife, to a bitter enemy within ("O what it is to have an old-cool duke, to be as slack in tongue as in performance") (I. i. 74-5). The sexual implication of her slight on the Duke emphasises her intimate position but also reminds the audience of Vindice's commentary on the lustful nature of her wickedness ("his duchess that will do with the devil") (I. i. 4). She goes on to confirm that while "some [wives] would plot his death" she will avenge herself sexually, via adultery:

> And therefore wedlock faith shall be forgot.
> I'll kill him in his forehead; hate, there feed;
> That wound is deepest, though it never bleed (I. ii. 94; 106-8).

We see how the Duke's refusal to support her youngest son results in the surfacing of concealed resentment and prompts the Duchess to use her position to carry out the "deepest" revenge internally from inside the family unit. Referring to the horns said to grow from a cuckold's forehead, she states her intentions to figuratively kill the Duke in the most painful way, "in his forehead", via her sexual betrayal. The Duchess represents a cluster of anxieties surrounding women in early modern society in this scene and ones we have seen throughout the trajectory of this thesis, beginning with Atreus' consuming

fear of raising illegitimate children. The Duchess' prioritisation of her "blood" allegiances (children) over her legal obligations (marriage), create a conflict of interest with the state of the family (accusations similar to that levelled at traitors and Catholics in the period). The Duchess uses her privileged position to inflict the most painful revenge, and to become a powerful enemy within.

Gratiana becomes a similar internal enemy within her own family unit, for she is persuaded to vice on the promise of wealth. As a widow, Gratiana is no longer "contained" by her husband and is represented as highly vulnerable to the cogency of others. Jennifer Panek observes similar concerns with regards to Gratiana in her essay "The Mother as Bawd":

> [T]he play imagines instability, untrustworthiness, and a propensity to be swayed by appetite as the natural properties of mothers, both through drawing attention to a concept inseparable from motherhood-sexual experience (Panek 425).

Appetite and corruption in Gratiana are demonstrated not only sexually but also financially and to some extent, in metaphors of gluttony. Vindice/Piato seduces her with financial gain ("dazzle the world with jewels") but also with "the pleasure of the palace" and "[…] the stirring meats / Ready to move out of the dishes / That e'en now quicken when they're eaten" (II. i. 194-7). The conflation of sexual appetite with greed over their shared bestial nature and lack of control, is a trope we have seen before both in *Thyestes, Titus Andronicus* and, to a lesser extent, in *Hamlet.* Peter Stallybrass comments on the frequency of this motif: "It is, indeed, striking how frequently within Renaissance discourses of the body the gradient of displacement is from the "sexual"/genital to the digestive/excretory" (Stallybrass 135). Hamlet's disgust at his mother's sudden, sexual interest in his uncle is described in another metaphor of meats ("the funeral baked meats / Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables") and both Atreus and Titus enact their revenge for sexual crimes (adultery/rape) via a monstrous banquet (*H*. I. ii. 180-1). The reference to the "stirring meats" that "quicken when they're eaten" is likely a reference to the provisions being readily replaced, but the verb "quicken" was also used to describe the stage in pregnancy when a woman feels the movement of a foetus. Here, like in *Thyestes,* a link is being drawn around overindulgence, between being sexually and digestively insatiable, being heavy with child and heavy with food.

This type of imagery is linked with the theme of "permeability" which surrounds mothers (and potential mothers) in *The Revenger's Tragedy.* Concerns around sexual, biological, moral and linguistic permeability are conflated; if women are sexually promiscuous it consequently follows that they are "leaky" vessels, easily bought and easily persuaded. The primary reason mothers in this play cause so much anxiety, is that their maternal body is not only demonstrably sexually obtainable and "highly prone to infirmities", but also "exercises considerable and troublesome power" (Panek 426). Michael Neill points out that in contrast to the permeable woman, men were conceived in the period, as Vindice suggests, as being biologically "made close": "their very gender, rendering them, ideally at least, self-contained and impenetrable" (I. iii. 81; Neill 407). This was one of the reasons why women were perceived as more vulnerable to a corruptive environment. Virginity (and death) were perceived as ways of maintaining a barrier of insularity. Both mother and daughter describe this paradox in a similar way, but with opposing intentions. In attempting to persuade her daughter to succumb to Lussurioso's advances, Gratiana describes "virginity" as "paradise, locked up" and Castiza mirrors this metaphor in describing her "virgin honour" as a "crystal tower" (II. i. 152; IV. iv. 152). Both Gratiana and the Duchess (like Tamora before them) represent the dangers of motherhood, for as women who have been initiated into the sexual sphere, they are penetrable, subject to their passions, and not to be trusted. As mothers, they represent a threat to the line of inheritance; Gratiana's ill-advised approach to Castiza's potential marriage and the Duchess' incestuous desire for her stepson are both representative of pollutants and poisons endangering future familial integrity.

One of the most repeated themes of penetration and infiltration in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is via the tongue, both literally and figuratively. The Duke's tongue attempts to permeate Gloriana and puncture her chastity twice over, and Vindice makes sure he is repaid with poison, yet another type of symbolic invasion. The language of greed and gluttony is once again invoked as the Duke's mouth is infiltrated and as his teeth are consumed by the poison "those that did eat are eaten" (III. v. 156; 159). Vindice highlights the permeability, and thus femininity, of the Duke and mocks him for inadequately maintaining the barriers that keep men "close". When the Duke cries out in shock "O, my tongue!" Vindice advises "'twill teach you to kiss closer", i.e. with the mouth closed (III. v. 160-1). To ensure the Duke witnesses the "banquet" of the sexual union of his wife with

his bastard in silence, Vindice has Hippolito “nail down his tongue” with his dagger (III. v. 185; 192-3). Peter Stallybrass comments on the frequency of the “phantasy of the gendered mouth” on the Jacobean stage; he confirms how symbolism of the mouth in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, through poisoning and kisses, connected ideas about penetration, gestation and “the enclosure of the family against all "foreign matter"”:

> The mouth: a gaping hole, an absence through which presence is formed and dissolved; the lips, sealed in denial of all circulation or open to seal the marriage of "our souls" (4.4.57) or to eat "noble poison" (1.3.170); the poisoned or poisoning tongue; the teeth which eat but which also are "eaten out" (3.5.159) (Stallybrass 133; 43).

In line with revenge justice, Vindice is keen for the Duke to witness the Duchess and Spurio and the “incest of their lips” directly after the poisoned kiss of Gloriana, as a reminder that the Duke has produced another in his image as “scorns are the hires of scorns” (III. v. 180; 183). The Duchess and Spurio kiss to seal their union and exclusion of the Duke out of his own family. This is conflated with talk of food and banqueting and tasting the “sweet pleasure” of sin:

> SPURIO: Had not that kiss a taste of sin, ‘twere sweet
> DUCHESS: Why, there’s no pleasure sweet but it is sinful.
> SPURIO: True, such a bitter sweetness fate hath given (III. v. 201-3).

In this sense, the tongue takes on a very visceral, but also social and political function. For the Duke, his tongue is weapon with which to conquer another, but also a type of open wound or a vulnerability. Stallybrass’s description of the mouth as a “a gaping hole, an absence through which presence is formed and dissolved” is interesting, for this is a description that could equally apply to the womb. And like earlier discussions in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus* we return to the tongue as a weapon of autonomy; and to speech as a type of birth. The tongue is shown to be a weapon in its ability to penetrate physically (Gloriana) but also psychologically (Gratiana/Castiza). Many have commented on the scenes involving the attempted corruption of Vindice’s mother and sister as being largely unrelated to the central revenge plot, but this is one of the ways in which they converge. Vindice’s beloved was fatally infiltrated in life, and now lies sealed in death, and so he must return to this violation in assessing the defences of his female kin, lest he expect more of the same. Stallybrass comments on this building of barriers and anxieties surrounding the potential admittance of threat via the female body:

> The closed body, then, represents the negation of "conversation," that most Janus-faced of Renaissance terms, pointing at once to the supposedly civilizing powers of rhetoric and toward its powers of corruption, and above all of sexual corruption. Words, food, sex, money: all circulate out from the court, all are aimed at the entry, the "poisoning," of the chaste woman (Stallybrass 138).

This “negation of conversation” is put to the test in Vindice/Piato’s rhetorically adept attempts to persuade, first his sister to prostitution, then to “lay / Hard siege” on his mother to act as bawd: “[…] I will lay / Hard siege unto my mother, though I know / A siren’s tongue could not bewitch her so” (II. i. 50-2). We see how language has the potential to pierce the external in the same way as other motifs of *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, including poisoning, kissing, intercourse, and violence. When Castiza is approached by Piato/Vindice she is referred to as “Madonna” by her servant, Donaldo, as representative of her purity, and is offended by the phrasing of Donaldo who attests that her visitor would like a “mouth to mouth” (II. i. 10; 12). Castiza chastises him to speak plainly “Why, say so, madman, and cut off a great deal of dirty way” (II. i. 17). We see the purpose of this short exchange is to draw attention to the doubling of speech with the dangers of sexual activity in this play, where being “open” to persuasion is tantamount to being amenable to sexual advances.

Women are required to be “closed”, to the temptations of the court so their integrity is not tainted with the corruption of the environment. This fear of intermingling and integration is reflected in the incestuous atmosphere of the court, made explicit in the affair of the Duchess and Spurio, but also implicit in Vindice’s attempted “seduction” of Gratiana and Castiza. Vindice is (seemingly) desperate to know his mother is virtuous, and consequently, that his past is impenetrable, locked and secure. For if his mother can be corrupted with skilful rhetoric and flattery, then nothing is certain for Vindice. This resonates with the ultimate tale of transmission of sin in the Bible, where Eve is deceived by the language of the snake that “utter[s] words sweet and thick” (I. iii. 183). Vindice considers verbal and physical penetrability part of female nature, and particularly motherhood ("That woman is all male whom none can enter") (II. i. 112). When Vindice’s words begin to pierce her resolve, Gratiana responds:

> O heavens! This overcomes me!
> […]
> It is too strong for me, men know that know us,

> We are so weak their words can overthrow us.
> He touched me nearly, made my virtues bate
> When his tongue struck upon my poor estate (II. i. 102; 104-7).

Gratiana uses the language of seduction ("overcome", "touched me nearly") but also of battle ("overthrow", "struck upon", "bate") when she describes being persuaded by Piato. Like the seduction and violence that preceded them, his words pierce her externality and become part of her interiority. Yet despite the "full force" of her "mother's words", Castiza is steadfast in her resilience (II, I, 175-6). She too uses battleground motifs to describe her "guarded" virginity:

> CASTIZA For no tongue has force to alter me from honest.
> If maidens would, men's words could have no power;
> A virgin honour is a crystal tower,
> Which, being weak, is guarded with good spirits;
> Until she basely yields, no ill inherits (IV. iv. 149-54).

Castiza describes a woman's will as being the "guard" of the "crystal tower" of virginity and denies the "force" of Piato's persuasions. Refuting her mother's descriptions of "weakness" she describes surrender (or "yield[ing]") as a choice. The double-force of Vindice and Gratiana comes across as a type of religious conversion, with Castiza as recusant: "False! I defy you both. / I have endured you with an ear of fire" (II. i. 230-1). Castiza describes her mother's pernicious rhetoric and her attempted conversion as a type of "poisoning" when she exclaims "Mother, come from that poisonous woman there!" (II. i. 233). Vindice had expressed the same sentiment when he was persuaded to plead Lussurioso's case to his sister and mother ("I've eaten noble poison") and Gratiana echoes this when she later admits her own words have returned to plague her: "O see, I spoke those words and now they poison me" (I. iii. 164; IV. iv. 136). As in *Hamlet*, motifs of literal and linguistic poisoning pervade the plot, frequently overlapping with tropes of femininity and permeability. Vindice describes his persuasion by Lussurioso as "noble poison", a bitter pill he has volunteered to swallow, but declares that women are particularly vulnerable to such poisoning by others as they are "easy in belief" (I. i. 107).

Laura Sangha and Johnathan Willis point out that while the Bible featured a mix of positive and negative representatives of women, the "deceitful ones, beginning with Eve, were repeated more often in all types of works by clerical and lay authors, who used these as justification for their ideas about marriage, parenting, the social order and many

other things" (Sangha and Willis 157). Where in *Thyestes* we saw recurrent allusions to Mary and the wondrous perceptions of pregnancy that were changing in the period, it is firmly the inheritance of Eve's sin that reverberates in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. When Castiza says "Thou'dst wish thyself unborn, when thou'rt unchaste" she taps into this notion of permeance of original sin and its relationship with sexuality and incontinence (IV. iv. 15). Gratiana appears to have internalised many of the misogynistic epithets raised by the play and self-consciously represents all the anxieties Vindice (and others in the play) articulate about women and mothers. In the first scene, Gratiana concurs with Vindice's judgement of his "worthy father", confirming that he was "too wise to trust [her] with his thoughts" and expressing her regret that his relatively meagre estate was not "fellow to his mind" (I. i. 119; 130; 123). She represents one who can be corrupted by her surroundings, and accepts Vindice's prompts about survival, and shifting morality, in the "time" that's "grown wiser" (II. i. 281).

Yet, concerns about encroaching immorality in women, and particularly in mothers, were not limited to their absorption of external delinquency, but extended to the risk of mothers to transmitting immorality to their children. Beatrice Groves describes how mothers were held to a higher moral standard (and generated increased anxiety regarding immorality) because of a widespread belief "that mothers passed on their moral (or immoral) nature to their children through breast-feeding" (Groves 133). Groves describes it as:

> [A] specifically feminine version of the doctrine of original sin, whereby the child inherited not only the sins of both parents at conception, but also had their mother's sins reinscribed through breastfeeding (Groves 133).

This would explain Vindice's conflict in desperately craving his mother's innocence and simultaneously insisting (almost ensuring) that she is guilty. Heather Hirschfeld confirms how "Reformers had put fresh pressure" on the doctrine of "original violation and inherited taint" in the period, resulting in an increased intensity in revenge plots at the turn of the seventeenth century (Hirschfeld *The End of Satisfaction* 73-4). Richard Sibbes, an early seventeenth-century Church of England clergymen, described as a "cautious Reformer" and "moderate Puritan" describes the "corruption of nature" that was thought to derive from original sin:

> First, by the sin of Adam, […] we were damned before we were born, as soon as we had a being in our mother's womb, by reason of our communion with Adam in that first sin. […] And then there is corruption of nature as a punishment of that first sin […] (Dever; Sibbes 336).

It is this "corruption of nature" that we see Vindice (along with Hamlet and Hieronimo) attempt to purge from the court in pursuit of absolution. However, it is not clear that either Vindice and Hippolito, or the audience believe such purgation to be possible. Vindice is gleeful in the corruption of Gloriana because it confirms what he already believes to be true, that inheritance and lineage are innately depraved and consequently worthless. Hirschfeld points out that "what the period understood as original sin" is the "great violation governing Elizabethan revenge tragedy", for no matter how hard the protagonist strives for retribution, the ultimate imbalance of sin can never be redressed (Hirschfeld *The End of Satisfaction* 72). We see evidence of this in *The Revenger's Tragedy,* but unlike Hieronimo and Horatio, or Hamlet and Old Hamlet, the protagonist's relationship with his father is a distant memory, and debates surrounding primogeniture are deferred to the adversaries in the Duke and his sons. Like Hamlet, Vindice laments the emptiness of his life since his father's death ("For since my worthy father's funeral,/ My life's unnatural to me, e'en compell'd / As if I liv'd now when I should be dead"), and as the play sets up several other similarities with *Hamlet* in these opening scenes, the audience may have been expecting a patrilineal ghost to drive the plot, but this is notably absent; all the focus is directed towards the mother, her propensity for sin and what this might signify for Vindice and Hippolito (I. i. 119-21). Thomas P. Anderson points out that in reality, Vindice can barely remember what happened to his father, he thinks he died of consumption but asks Gratiana for confirmation "Did he? 'lack – you know all, / You were his midnight secretary (I. i. 127-8; Anderson 159). Anderson confirms that Vindice's father's silence, is symbolic of the play's "short memory", where obligations to the past are fleeting and superficial (Anderson 159).

Storytelling and conclusions

The concerns of *The Revenger's Tragedy* revolve around the transmission (and inheritance of) corruptibility, from bodily contact, persuasive language or polluted environments. Through the symbolism of the chaste/promiscuous female, the play considers to what extent we can protect an inner "self" from corrosive externals, and to

some extent, whether this inner self is worthy of protection. Vindice represents the ultimate product of environment, when, like revenge protagonists before him, he comes to embody the very corruption he sought to eradicate. Vindice wishes to contain corruption, to stop it spreading like a disease, like a defective gene, to all that encounter it, but he does not take his own advice (given at great length to Gratiana and Castiza) about maintaining boundaries, and consequently becomes porous and permeable to sin. In divulging the information that incriminates him in the Duke's death, he becomes the "leaky vessel" he sought to defend against:

> Tis time to die, when we are ourselves our foes,
> When murd'rers shut deeds close, this curse does seal 'em:
> If none disclose 'em, they themselves reveal 'em.
> This murder might have slept in tongueless brass,
> But for ourselves and the world died an ass (V. iii. 109-13).

In previous plays, we have seen how revenge plots must end with the death of the protagonist, in order for a wider society to heal and progress; for the final dialogue to consolidate lessons learned from the revenger's tale and start afresh in that knowledge. However, in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, we see a rejection of continuity, and a stark departure from the storytelling ending: Vindice is not given the space to explain his actions before he and Hippolito are dragged from the stage under threat of death. There is no sense that Antonio wishes to "inherit" Vindice's tale to incorporate into the future of the Italian court, it simply comes to an abrupt end with their "speedy execution" (V. iii. 101). Vindice believes the balance has been restored in his killing of the Duke and his descendants "[t]he rape of your good lady has been quitted / With death on death" but Antonio pragmatically concludes "Away with 'em. Such an old man as he! / You that would murder him would murder me!" (V. iii. 89; 102-3). There is no sense of retributive justice, no further revenge called for by Antonio, only a simple acknowledgement that the corruption Vindice has embraced to murder the Duke will return upon him in time. The audience are not encouraged to believe sin has been "quitted" in the court; even Vindice's statement of revenge for Antonio's wife is unconvincing, for we were largely unaware that this was one of Vindice's (many) grievances. Middleton's desire to "out-do" *Hamlet,* with the multitude of victims and the multitude of revenge plots in *The Revenger's Tragedy* concludes with the realisation that the plot cannot be resolved, and equilibrium cannot be achieved. Antonio will never hear their stories, or incorporate their narratives, he simply

intends to “shut deeds close”, and hope “their blood may wash away all treason” (V. iii. 110; 128).

Some have described *The Revenger’s Tragedy* as an end to the genre, moving as it does towards tragicomedy and farce. I would agree that the play positions itself as a kind of conclusion, an end to the cycle of revenge, that so often looms over the “restorative” endings of earlier plays. I think this is most apparent in its refusal to bequeath its stories and events. All lines of inheritance are stopped in *The Revenger’s Tragedy,* the Duke’s descendants have been murdered, Vindice and Hippolito are condemned to death, Castiza remains chaste and the Duchess is banished; only unmarried, aged, childless Antonio is left as a solitary representation of the past: “Your hair will make the silver age again, / When there was fewer but more honest men” (V. iii. 85-6). Antonio’s position here is not the fountainhead of a new dynasty, but the opposite, represented as sterile, parched and fallow, he ushers in conclusions rather than new beginnings. T. B. Tomlinson confirms the play’s position in “capitalizing on” and “bringing to a head” a popular tradition in the theatre: “it was obviously the high point of an old tradition, not the beginning of a new” (Tomlinson 133). While it must be acknowledged that there are several ways in which the play “invite[s] critics to think of it across Elizabethan and Jacobean contexts” (*The Revenger’s Tragedy* could be considered a precedent of Jacobean and Caroline theatrical conventions; in its preoccupation with sex, cuckoldry and incest and in its tragicomic style), the play foregrounds conclusions and cessation over restoration and renewal (Crosbie "The State of the Art" 73). The ways in which the play self-consciously references and diverges from its predecessors certainly suggests that Middleton considered the play a concluding flourish on the revenge genre.

The traditional elements of memory, history and “return” are missing from the story arc in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*; ghosts do not return form the dead to demand revenge and cautionary tales of the past are not integrated into a restorative future. Aimee Ross-Kilroy suggests that Middleton uses Vindice to demonstrate the futility of the cyclical, *maius nefas* revenge and to some extent, in metatheatrical terms, the expiration of that particular theatrical style in his epilogue of the “ultimate” revenger:

> Rather than biting out his tongue as Hieronimo does, Vindice gives it free reign, ensuring his own doom in the process. Vindice’s confession epitomizes Middleton’s version of dramatic self-consciousness […]

> Vindice's remarks reveal his own awareness of how useless he now is, that to have outlived his revenge is ludicrous, even monstrous. He and his brother must die out of narrative necessity (Ross-Kilroy 63).

Perhaps Middleton saw the end of the genre in *The Revenger's Tragedy*'s predecessor, for amidst all the chaos and the bodies, Horatio promises the dying Hamlet that he shall "report [his] cause aright" to Fortinbras and the future of Denmark, but his capacity to do so is left uncertain (V. ii. 346). John Kerrigan highlights this sense of disbelief:

> Yet, can Horatio report either Hamlet or his cause aright? His brief account to Fortinbras, with its 'carnal, bloody and unnatural acts…accidental judgements, casual slaughters' […], suggests that he cannot, for everything that seems essential to Hamlet's tragedy is left out. Honest, compassionate, and intelligent though he is, Horatio is not equipped by circumstance to inform the yet unknowing world about the nunnery scene, Claudius' words to heaven, 'To be or not to be' or, indeed, any of those perplexed soliloquies (Kerrigan 189).

Despite Fortinbras desire to hear the "memor[ies]" of his "kingdom" and Horatio's confidence that he can "truly deliver" Hamlet's story, the audience are left questioning (V. ii. 396; 2). Hamlet's consciousness is so "inward" that it seems improbable that Horatio can report on all Hamlet's important confidences with the audience. Middleton takes this one step further in *The Revenger's Tragedy* where Vindice and Hippolito are dragged from the stage almost mid-sentence, and Antonio, considering the matter closed and refusing to hear any more of their motives, "need only clear up a few dead bodies" (Ross-Kilroy 62).

Thomas Rist describes the final lines of the play as a "formal tidying up of loose ends, being explanatory, to the point, and wholly without melodrama" (Rist *Drama of Commemoration* 106). Antonio stands alone on stage for the very final lines, presumably speaking vaguely to the guards leading Vindice and Hippolito into the wings, or to the audience directly:

> How subtly was that murder closed! Bear up
> Those tragic bodies; 'tis a heavy season.
> Pray heaven their blood may wash away all treason (V. iii. 126-8).

In describing how the murder was swiftly and quietly hidden, Antonio draws a parallel between this and his conclusion of the play, where "tragic bodies" can be laid to rest, and

a lack of mourning or inquest will allow him to stem the blood flow, “wash[ing] away” what’s past. This somewhat stunted ending comes as something as a surprise for the audience who have watched as the play hurtled through multiple “natural” conclusions in a cycle of continuation:

> Gloriana has been avenged, Vindice has fulfilled his dramatic and ethical ‘purpose’, and yet the play’s own inexorable, even tyrannical, logic subsumes its supposed premise. Though two full acts follow the Duke’s murder, their narrative purpose is radically superfluous (Coddon 136).

Yet there are less than thirty lines between Vindice’s confession to the murder of the Duke and Antonio washing the stage clean. Such suddenness in the execution (of the brothers, and of the play) jolts the audience out of their expectations:

> […] the stage direction removing Vindice and Hippolito denies audiences either the pathos of two dramatized deaths or the funeral and mourning that might have followed. Finally, amid such death, the death of the play is like a quickly ‘closed’ coffin (Rist *Drama of Commemoration* 106).

Rist describes how *The Revenger’s Tragedy* can be understood as an “illustration of restraint in mourning” and the sudden closure of the action is particularly evocative of the curtailing of mourning rituals in Reforming England; in a similar way, the audience are left hesitant and unsure of how to proceed (Rist *Drama of Commemoration* 106). Although Vindice carries the token of memory throughout the play in the emblematic skull of Gloriana, the play is significant in its depiction of the forgotten dead (Gloriana is named only once, Antonio’s wife is identified only as “lady”, and the name of Vindice’s father is not given). The closed-circle of sexuality in the court becomes the closed-circle of revenge and the play’s refusal to incorporate the past reflects the closing of a genre that similarly celebrated those connections between the living and the dead, and between the past and the future. The play severs ties with the past in several senses; *The Revenger’s Tragedy* rejects the ethos of mourning and integration in revenge tragedy, it curtails the endless cycle of vengeance, and by executing this so extravagantly, brings conclusion to the *maius nefas* convention. Middleton’s play simply refuses to be integrated, reformed or elaborated on.

Conclusion: telling the story of inheritance

This thesis has explored the development of inheritance and legacy tropes in revenge tragedy from the 1550s to the 1610s. It has looked specifically at how such tropes and conventions reflect problematic relationships with the past in the period, influenced by the political and religious instability of the sixteenth century. I have demonstrated how a disordered succession, a monarch without heirs, and social changes to birth and death rituals brought about by the Reformation, affected the conventions and motifs of the revenge genre. The revenge premise is fundamentally "backward-looking", and we have seen how protagonists become "entrammel[ed] in contradictions", isolated in grief and suspended in time, in their attempts to requite the actions of the past (Neill *Issues of Death* 248). The sense of existing between old and new worlds is a prominent theme of these plays, and one in which inheritance and continuity play an important role. This study has revealed that, fundamentally, the plays pose a core question: how can a problematic and complex inheritance be incorporated to prevent destructive repetitions of the past? Some plays are more optimistic than others about the achievability of this outcome, but all examine the difficulties of integrating an inconsistent, antagonistic, and often violent past into an assured, orderly, and restorative future.

Many studies of the revenge tragedy mode have analysed its roots in classical and medieval theatre, and its key position in the development of tragedy on the early modern stage. However, while related themes have been explored, inheritance as a thematic concern in early modern drama has been relatively overlooked (Dowd 5).[39] There have been recent critical studies on how Reformist doctrine, and particularly their attempts to curtail grief and mourning rituals, affected the development of revenge tragedy.[40] There has also been studies on how the succession affected the theatrical

[39] *The Dynamics of Inheritance on the Shakespearean Stage* (2015) by Michelle M. Dowd discusses the importance of the patrilineal in plays of this period, but her discussion of tragedy focusses primarily on the latter half of the seventeenth century. Much of the work that has been done on remembrance and memory, or obligations and debt also tap into some inheritance tropes. *Drama and the Succession to the Crown, 1561 – 1633* (2011) by Lisa Hopkins discusses how political contentions surrounding the succession impacted the development of early modern drama, but the study doesn't directly address revenge tragedy.

[40] For an in-depth look at this argument, see Thomas Rist, *Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration in Reforming England* (2008), and Stephen Mullaney, *The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare* (2015).

style of the sixteenth century, but not specifically how this may have influenced the rapid emergence and popularity of revenge narratives. It is important to note that such emphasis on inheritance, and on incorporating the lessons of the past, is of course not particular to revenge tragedy in itself, and that variants of this can be seen in other genres, including comedy. However, as I have explored in the chapters of this thesis, the preoccupation with physical and conceptual inheritance, with repetition and remembrance of life-stories in speech and performance, is particularly strong in plays of this genre. We see how theatrical interests progress from classical notions of the hereditary curse and the *maius nefas* of revenge, to more secular understandings of legal balance and debt, of individual and collective obligations, and the inheritance of language and legacy. As the plays develop through translation and quotation into a hybrid genre of native and classical tradition, so too do their thematic concerns, from the monstrous inescapable curses of *Thyestes*, to the individual and collective responsibilities to the law, to God, to conscience, and to memory.

The following sections summarise the key themes I have covered across all five primary texts and why I think this study has been a useful contribution to the field. I will look briefly at how the plays conclude, and what this might reveal about changing understandings of inheritance and legacy. Finally, I consider further research in this study and where I would like to take the analysis in the future.

Hereditary curse and revenge

Shaping my analysis around inheritance and legacy has enabled me to consider the various ways in which revenge drama, a genre frequently dismissed as "a decadent, […] backwater of literary history", foregrounds the importance of paying tribute to the past, and interrogates the possibility of restoration and continuity in the aftermath of violence and loss (Woodbridge *English Revenge Drama* 274). Competing desires for both excess and cessation, and the examination of violence as a neutralising action, echo similar concerns in classical tragedy, ideas which were frequently explored through the hereditary curse motif. Elements of fatalism are evident in the thematic explorations of injustice and, significantly, these texts demonstrate how the familial curse overlaps with, and to some extent evolves into, the revenge economy of the sixteenth-century stage,

with eternal reciprocity and excessive violence passed down the generations, it becomes the familial curse minus the paganistic framework of the gods (Burrill 489).

We have also seen how these early ideas of the curse overlap with reemphasised Reformist understandings of the "corrupting patrimony" of original sin in the period (Hirschfeld 72). Both Thyestes' and Titus' children die for the sins of their fathers, but the plays probe broader understandings of the inescapable contamination of inherited guilt and inherited suffering in the form of legacy. I have demonstrated in this study, the genre's Senecan preoccupation with the loss of children, and the death of futurity. Hieronimo is left childless and desultory after the death of Horatio, Richard III tries to manipulate a heritage of instability and bloodshed to position himself as sovereign, and Vindice seeks to create a future free from the pollution of the past. Bodily inheritance tropes (pregnancy, birth, blood, wombs) are often used in contrast to cultural, political, and civic inheritance. And while the former is frequently associated with contamination and corruption, and the latter with peace and prosperity, the texts struggle to find a space in between, delving into the bloody realities of suffering and its refusal to be incorporated.

Inheritance at the turn of the seventeenth century

It has become clear throughout the study that malevolent and consumptive cycles of revenge resonated with the authors of these plays, who perhaps saw successive childless monarchs, the instability of the crown, and the prospect of civil war in early modern England, reflected in its inescapable curse. Some of the major themes of revenge tragedy: violence and excess, ghosts and memory, disguise and performance, soliloquy and commentary, justice and balance, all have roots in a period that was preoccupied with establishing continuity, with establishing productive relationships with the past, and the restorative power of hereditary succession. The parent-child relationships in this thesis have almost all been plagued by violent pollution, and we have seen how established "reproductive futurism", the preserving and redeeming quality of bodily heirs, gradually evolved into more abstract understandings of legacy (Edelman 21). A transition which echoed contemporary anxieties surrounding the succession, for as Elizabeth's likelihood of producing a natural heir dwindled and James was ushered in as her successor, fixed, biological understandings of inheritance had to be mitigated accordingly.

Thyestes, Hieronimo, and Titus bewail their loss of heirs as a loss of self, but by the turn of the seventeenth century, the childless Richard and Vindice pursue more conceptual understandings of legacy. The earlier plays emphasise pregnancy, birth, and bodily heirs, or lack of them; Thyestes, Hieronimo, and Titus all have their children taken from them and lament their future stopped. After his son is murdered, Hieronimo describes feeling a loss of self: “But hope, heart, treasure, joy, and bliss, / All fled, failed, died, yea, all decayed with this” (IV. iv. 93-94). Hieronimo’s hope and his conceptual understanding of the future died with Horatio, and beyond revenge for his murder, he struggles to reconcile his place within the remaining narrative. Richard and Vindice both mourn their loss of opportunity and resent the circumstances that cheated them out of the lives they felt they should have lived (*R3*. I. i. 15). In the absence of heirs, they count their pursuit of revelatory change as their legacy, seeking (in different ways) to decimate their environments and usher in a new age: Richard in his attempts to construct a bastard dynasty from the fractured remains of the Wars of the Roses, and Vindice in appointing himself moral arbiter of the corrupt Italian court. Of course, neither Richard nor Vindice are particularly successful or sympathetic characters by the close of the play, so it could perhaps be argued that their pursuit of a conceptual legacy is an inherently flawed one. Both Richard and Vindice outlive their revenge narrative. Richard’s revenge is in his violent orchestration of his path to the throne, and Vindice’s is in the murder of the Duke, but both live beyond this point and into much less structured surroundings, where they falter and are eventually written out by their successors. The conclusions differ in that Richmond pays tribute to the trauma of the wars and instils confidence that the past and the present will “by God’s fair ordinance conjoin together”, whereas *The Revenger’s Tragedy’s* sardonic tone, suggests a self-conscious rejection of inheritance in Antonio (*R3.* V. v. 31). Fundamentally, all the protagonists grapple with the question of how to forge a sense of continuity when facing a future abruptly stopped, but the stability of inheritance as the plays progress becomes less invested in heirs and more concerned with remembrance, memory and an effectual incorporation of the past.

Religious upheaval, memory, remembrance, and ghosts have been conducive areas of research in recent criticism and ones that have informed this thesis at various points. However, it is also important to note that remembrance in these plays is not limited to the dead, but equally applicable to the living, who pre-emptively fear their story being

forgotten. The tragic isolation and ostracization described by R. L. Kesler, often comes to represent a kind of pre-death as the protagonists are written out of the collective narrative (Kesler 492). Frequently resigned to their own obsolescence, the protagonists of this study construct their own obituaries in their revenge, devising and defining how they shall be remembered by this new world. There is recurrent significance placed on storytelling and how the collective can both remember and heed the lessons of individual struggle to avoid a cycle of destructive repetition. Thomas Rist describes how the ghosts of revenge tragedy "repeatedly fear being forgotten", and I would argue that the living protagonists of these plays, driven to distraction and social isolation by violent events, come to haunt their environments in a similar way; like ghosts returning to a world they once knew, they concern themselves only with legacy and remembrance (Rist *Drama of Commemoration* 14).[41] We see this particularly in *Titus Andronicus* and *The Spanish Tragedy* where words are all that lives on: they are uttered and they disappear, but they have the potential of being repeated, and it is in the repetition that history and legacy are established.

Narrative conclusions

Repetition occupies a quasi-paradoxical position in these plays, for while the repetition of stories is frequently positioned as a restorative and progressive practice, it is a practice that is fundamentally about preventing the repetition of the past. Verbal and visual representations of the past hold the potential to ensure that it is incorporated into a productive future. Rituals of memory become vital prompts, and it is suggested that stories of the past may hold the potential to prevent an endless cycle of the same. As Michelle Dowd suggests, lineage is fundamentally bound up with narrative in these texts, as they repeatedly question "the stories we tell […] who will inherit or who will come next" (Dowd 4). Disrupted inheritance and civil instability are frequent concerns of the plays and of the period: in a world of social, political, religious, personal, and temporal upheaval, the characters persistently try to stitch together a coherent narrative from insecure fragments. The isolation of the tragic protagonist from the changing world

[41] Most famously Hamlet's father, but this would also apply to Don Andrea and the victims of Richard III.

around them frequently leads to an increasing understanding of themselves as a legacy of the past, as a shining example or a cautionary tale, for future generations.

The speech Heywood adds to *Thyestes* revolves around the protagonist being made a spectacle and manifestation of his crime; almost every stanza begins with a call to bear witness ("Yet break thee out from cursed seats, and here remain with me: / Ye need not now to be afraid, the air and heaven to see; "Come see a meetest match for thee [foulest hell] "; "Flock here ye foulest fiends of hell […] Come see the glutted guts of mine" (IV. iv. 13-4; 19; 21-2). It contains an ambiguous call for vengeance ("And vengeance ask on wicked wight your thunderbolt to throw") but his speech is largely about self-punishment, and we see Thyestes grappling with a desire to end his misery and consign himself to infamy ("Why do you not, O gates of hell, unfold?") and a continuation of his story ("yet turn again ye skies awhile") (IV. iv. 62; 47; 53). The need for punishment to be made a spectacle and a cautionary tale, for the universe (and the audience) to witness is foregrounded in Heywood's addition. Similarly, while the framing device of *The Spanish Tragedy* concludes with the "endless tragedy" of revenge, Hieronimo's epilogue is concerned with performativity and spectacle ("See here my show, look on my spectacle!") (IV. v. 48). Hieronimo attempts to evoke empathy and understanding, and to seal his legacy with his tale of revenge: "And, princes, now behold Hieronimo, / Author and Actor in this tragedy / Bearing his latest fortune in his fist; / And will as resolute conclude his part / As any of the actors gone before" (IV. iv. 145-9). The need for understanding and assimilation at the close of *The Spanish Tragedy* is underlined by the King and the Viceroy's confusion, and their insistence that Hieronimo, having bitten out his tongue, explain his reasons for their comprehension, but Hieronimo resolving that there are "no more words" stabs himself and Castile to death. In *Titus Andronicus,* Aaron's fate is made a demonstration of lessons learned by the state and Lucius is entrusted to "tell the tale", to plead the case of his grandfather and his myriad woes, to the "gracious auditory" of Rome with a "report [that] is just and full of truth" (V. iii. 93; 95; 114). Like Hamlet, who begs Horatio to "report [him] and [his] cause aright", Lucius requests the next generation remember their grandfather's story:

> Many a story hath he told to thee,
> And bid thee bear his pretty tales in mind
> And talk of them when he was dead and gone (*H*. V. ii. 346; *TA*. V. iii. 163-5).

In *Richard III,* there is a break with this pattern, which is perhaps not surprising as its historical basis presents different constraints. While there is no talk of commemorating Richard, rather a sense of writing him out of history as a usurper and an anomaly, there is a sense of incorporating a violent past into a more assured future, with the union of the "white rose and the red" (V. v. 19). In contrast, the conclusion of *The Revenger's Tragedy* is the antithesis of the storytelling conclusion, where inheritance is rejected, and observations are refused. Vindice is not given the time to explain his reasons and Antonio does not ask. In a parody of the revenger's predilection for summarising and narrating, Vindice remarks:

> When murd'rers shut deeds close, this curse does seal 'em,
> If none disclose 'em, they themselves reveal 'em (V. iii. 110-1).

There is a lasting sense of futures stopped with the death of heirs in *Thyestes,* Heywood builds on Seneca's abrupt ending of "I consign you to your children for punishment" with the additional scene that features Thyestes alone, begging for the gods to act, to punish, to requite, and bring some meaning to his tragedy (Fitch 327). We see something similar in the revenge protagonists that succeed Thyestes, who all seek a meaningful legacy, but are faced with varying levels of isolation and insignificance. There is a powerful sense that Thyestes' suffering should be absorbed into a broader narrative (in essence this is the dramatic purpose of the additional scene) but there is very little hope in Thyestes' monologue, he has been exiled from the action of the play and appears to speak into a vacuum, in a scene which foregrounds Hieronimo shouting in vain to an unhearing King, or Titus "recount[ing] [his] sorrows to a stone" (III. i. 9). We see as the plays progress how meaning is constructed through a combination of forgetting and remembering; the individual protagonist is consumed by grievances of the past and the narrative dictates that he must quit his debt and sacrifice his life to restore the future of the collective.

All the texts in this study conclude by questioning the ways in which violent histories might be incorporated into a wider narrative to mitigate the impact of a traumatic past, and ultimately question whether aspirations of stability and balance can be best achieved through continuity or revision. The methods of assimilation broadly progress from the continuity of heirs to the legacy of the individual, as the popular opinion shifts

from desiring a natural heir of Elizabeth's body, to safeguarding her legacy in the nation's memory. This desire for biological, political, and societal continuity is paramount in revenge narratives, and storytelling and performance are revisited time and again as a way of preserving (but also adapting and amending) history and memory. The "bleak […] terrain" of the Senecan revenge narrative may not allow for any real confidence in peaceful futures, but there is a fleeting hope that the incorporation of a traumatic past into a structured narrative will foster a sense of cohesion and collective memory, enabling descendants to overcome destructive patterns (Braden "Senecan Tragedy and the Renaissance" 292).

Future research

The trajectory I have followed in this thesis has chronologically plotted the use of inheritance tropes in revenge drama from the 1550s to the 1610s and my research in this area has raised several points of analysis that I would like to consider in the future. The mid-century translations have been given relatively little critical attention and so in future work I would like to look more closely at them as a group of texts and at how the different translators worked with tropes of inheritance and legacy. Researching the earlier chapters also raised some interesting research questions about the ways in which the texts of the 1560s absorb both classical and native influences with regards to inheritance and succession, and in the future, I would like to examine Norton and Sackville's *Gorboduc* and John Pickering's *Horestes* in more detail, as two of the earliest revenge tragedies in English.

Thematically, there is ample material to consider in a discussion of how disordered successions are explored through cannibalism tropes in revenge plays of this period. Building on the pregnancy motifs identified in *Thyestes,* there are other texts such as John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* (1601) and *The Insatiate Countess* (1611), and Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker's *The Bloody Banquet* (1609) that equate feasting with sexual excess and pregnancy. Another interesting, and potentially related, avenue, might be to look in detail at the trope of incest that emerges in later revenge plays and how relates to notions of polluted inheritance, John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613) and John Ford's *Tis Pity she's a Whore* (1629) might be good points of

continuation from *The Revenger's Tragedy* and would allow me to explore new revenge traditions that might begin, rather than conclude, with Vindice.

Concerns surrounding inheritance and legacy continue into seventeenth-century and Restoration theatre, particularly themes surrounding female fertility and infidelity, but it is perhaps fair to suggest that later variations on the theme concern themselves less with Senecan notions of inescapable grief, despair, and displacement. Stephen Purcell suggests that the revenge protagonist differs from those of classical tragedy in that he "[…] experiences no *anagnorisis*, or realization: he tends to be as determined to fulfil his vengeful mission at the end of the play as he was at the beginning, dying as he completes it" (Purcell 90). We see this in Hieronimo's defiant biting out of his tongue, in Titus' bloody murder-suicide, and even in the two later texts, in Richard and Vindice, for despite his ghostly visitation, Richard is still calling for his horse while dying on the battlefield; and despite inadvertently condemning himself to death, Vindice persists in validating his actions whilst being dragged from the stage ("I' faith, we're well: our mother turned, our sister true, / We die after a nest of dukes – adieu") (V. iii. 124-5). I would suggest that this is related to contemporary concerns with a fractured and disjointed past. The protagonists of these plays fairly swiftly come to understand themselves as relics of the past. Once the "backward-looking" debt has been established and their task is laid out, revenge protagonists frequently anticipate their own obsolescence; prematurely consigned to history they find purpose in remembrance and the preservation of continuing memory.

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